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OUR POETS

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ARTHUR LYNCH.

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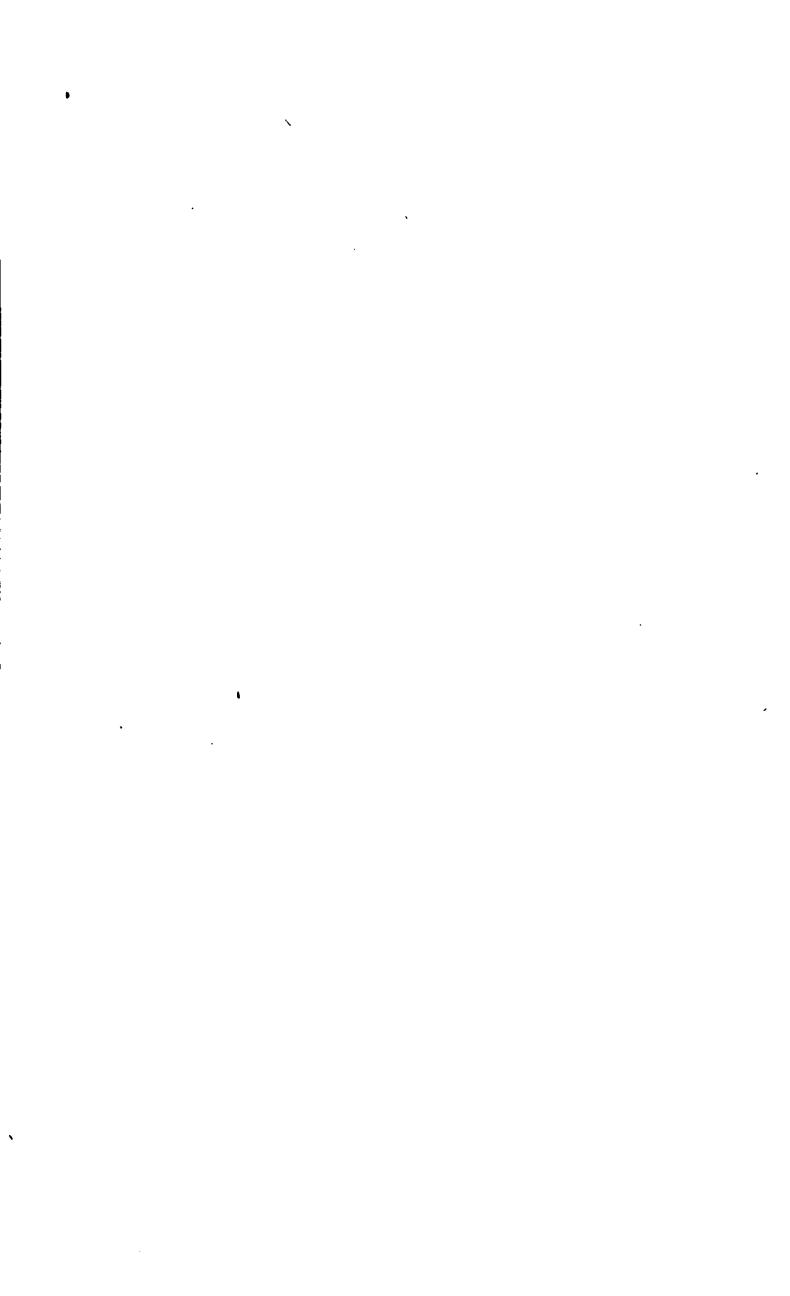
OF LEXINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS





To E. W. D. Layden Esq
with best wishes & kind regards,

Arthur Lynch
Oct / 1894
OUR POETS!



OUR POETS!

BY

ARTHUR LYNCH

Author of

"Modern Authors,"

"Approaches: The Poor Scholar's Quest of a Mecca,"

"The Koran of Love."

"Neither is my blood ditch-water"

BONAPARTE

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1894

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To
THE BRITISH PUBLIC
THE AUTHOR
BEGS TO DEDICATE
THIS BOOK.



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Our Poets !

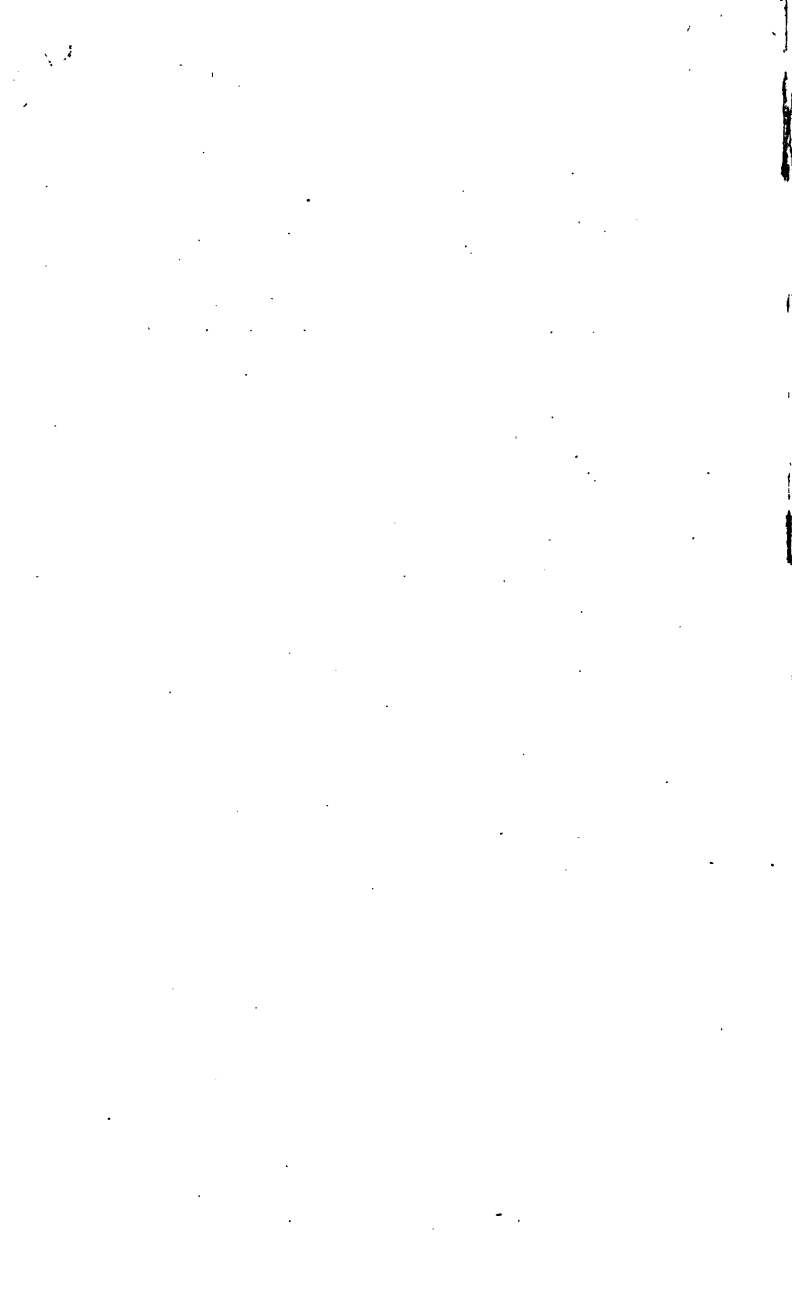
PROEM.

I.

I'll tell the truth, the hardest thing to do,
And most original of all the arts
By which we trick out in their vestures new
Our thoughts all trim for literary marts.
The truth is not the mode, 'tis very true,
And lacks the charm familiar Cant imparts,
And though it leave each fault and blemish bare
Is yet the costliest garment one can wear.

II.

Not for the first cost, that indeed is nought,
And nought for stitching, tagging, and repair,
But for the penalties of being caught
Sporting in public such outrageous wear ;
Yet Pride, or Pique, or Virtuous Scorn has brought
(That last phrase smacks so well, please leave it there).
Myself to that condition when I cry
The truth must out ; and " here goes ; do or die ! "



To E. W. D. Lyden Esq
with best wishes & kind regards,

Arthur Lynch

Oct / 1894

OUR POETS!

IX.

But touching now that quoted line of Walt,
With which I ended stanza number iv,
To keep the substance fresh with that rare salt,
Of his good nature, wholesome to the core,
'Twas mainly to suggest that half the fault
Of egotism's gone whene'er we soar
Beyond our petty selves to that calm air,
Where even to ourselves we may be fair ;

X.

And with reflective mien regard the world,
And measure clearly all the eye can see ;
Yet feel the throbs of passion high upwhirled,
And boiling round us in their ecstasy—
A pinnacle amid life's waters, swirled,
And fretted by an everlasting sea ;
A barque that beats on to an unknown port,
And spreads its white wings to the storm-wind's sport ;

XI.

An " anything you please " that holds the type :
A single soul, amid the march of man,
Separate, submerged ; a harsh and feeble pipe,
To swell the mighty music of old Pan ;
But doubtless now the thought is fairly ripe,
At which these various metaphors began,
To swallow like a cherry at a bite,
Or pack within a nutshell snug and tight.

XII.

'Tis that I use a plain, unvarnished "I,"
 As being, then, least egotistical,
 Perhaps of all the tricks of style, whereby
 We furbish up the art linguistical ;
 And so, unfamed, unknown, and careless, I
 Leap in the arena, poet-fistical—
 My only skill is truth—*che sara sara*,
 I feel, I write—for good or bad—*voilà !* 1

XIII.

Holà ! what crude, unsacramental words,
 To sound a signal in that cultured plain,
 Where browse the sacred literary herds,
 That claim by right hypocrisy's demesne.
 And yet press on I must, howe'er absurd's
 My scant equipment for the high campaign,
 And e'en though these Republicans of Letters
 Be stuck on high, just liké their ancient "betters."

XIV.

Each on his throne they sit like little pagods,
 All snuffing incense and retailing verse,
 That not an age of poetry since Hesiod's,
 Has ever known more copious, or worse
 Or if they wake at times—as Homer nods,
 'Tis to hear Rudyard rowdily rehearse,
 His banjo breakdowns for the Music Halls,
 Or silly Swinburne puff his verbous squalls. ✓

XV.

Yet they hedge in the Heliconian spring,
Where I, a pilgrim, fain would quench my thirst,
And while their myrmidons the incense swing,
Protest their wrath in many a snorting burst,
Or mounting Pegasus, with damaged wing,
Charge, broken-windedly, where'er they durst ;
" And minions " hidden from my view the while,
Shower petty darts, in most chivalrous style. ²

XVI.

But even the worm will turn, and so will I, ³
Much like the soldier of Lucullus, who,
Robbed of his dinner, charges at full cry
His meal to capture, and the city too ; *
And if I perish, better fighting die,
Than creep to honours like that wretched crew,
Whose pinging verse by bourgeois souls admired,
Sounds the loud timbrels of the uninspired.

* A story related in verse by Martial. He gained such fame by this feat that he was afterwards marked out for a " forlorn hope." " Get a man who has lost his dinner," he said.

OSCAR WILDE.

Who's he that sits upon a velvet throne,
 That slow, lymphatic, rather vacuous man,
 Who pipes his trivial ditties of no tone *
 As if the listening world were hearing Pan ;

With every note the silly mawkish mien
 Of some gauche school-girl drenched in vanity,
 The while one vainly strives the sense to glean
 Of what at first seems sheer inanity.

But mark how, near the throne, a bevy sits
 Of strange young men, and sickly to the view,
 Who chirp in minim key, like fledgling wits,
 Whene'er their Sultan utters something " new."

I say a Sultan, just to give the hint
 Of that exotic air I can't explain,
 As if the poppy's bloom, the emerald's glint.
 Should ornament that richly enwrought train.

* "Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone."—*Keats*.

As if the scent of attar-gûl and musk,
 And thick aroma of Arabian spice,
 Bore on the loaded wings of shadowing dusk,
 The dear *rencherissement* of cultured vice,

As if the mind should stray an idle hour,
 In that sweet realm of the Arabian Nights,
 Where 'mid the courts of withering Moslem power
 There flickered but the flame of warm delights.

A gross, but soft and flaccid luxury,
 The morbid fancies of a race effete,
 Strong now in nothing but their uxory,
 But fascinating to our dear æsthete,*

Then that is he—the famous Oscar Wilde,
 The darling *choyé* of our high *élite*,
 High priest of Art, æsthetic, undefiled,
 And esoteric culture's Paraclete.

Poet of dainty, trinket verses, wrought
 With patient skill of pretty filigree,
 Vendor of rather far-fetched gems of thought,
 —Fetched mainly from the mines of French *esprit*

And yet, and yet, this very brainless man,
 By spangly epigrams and tricks of stage,
 Contrives to shine the tinselled Sheridan,
 Of our most exquisite but crimping age.

* *Vide* the latest masterpiece.—*The Sphinx*:
 "Get hence you loathsome mystery! hideous animal get hence
 You wake in me each bestial sense. . . . You wake fond dreams of
 sensual life."

Turn to his "serious works," pardy! whence flows
The limpid stream of shallow, forceless prose,
Where wit's but common-place turned round about,
And thought is mainly used to keep thought out.*

And yet betimes he deepens with his themè,
And grows quite earnest in that last, supreme
And crowning effort of the cultured mind,
That still in lowest depths its joys must find,
And sounds the pæans to that "power" of sin, †
Like some Te Deum of a perverse kin.

With what fond zest he tells the varied mood
Of this new "Evil, be thou still my good."
How that the best fruits of the artists' creed,
Flourish in nations going fast to seed,
As witness that noteworthy love of green,
That in lost states and artists' souls is seen. ‡

Or how the lack of any guiding will
Tests the true poet even better still,
And how contempt of merely vulgar truth
Marks out infallibly the inspired youth! †
Such is the culture of these latter days
—Knick-knacks, glitter, farce, or passing craze ‡

* "Nothing is more evident than that Nature hates Mind."—*The Decay of Lying*.

† "He had that curious love of green, which in individuals is always the sign of a subtle artistic temperament, and in nations is said to denote a laxity, if not a decadence of morals,"—*Pen, Pencil and Poison*.

‡ "The only form of lying that is absolutely beyond reproach is Lying for its own sake, and the highest development of this is, as we have already pointed out, Lying in Art."—*The Decay of Lying*.

Or else in search of deeper mysteries,
The diletante turns the musty tome
That hides from grateful sight the histories
Of days obscure of old degenerate Rome ;
And as Petronius Arbiter found Nero
A patron who made " swans of all his geese,"
Just so Tiberius interests Oscar's hero
And Capri gives the cue to his caprice, ⁶
But what the final secret, who shall say,
And inward drop of that sad pilgrimage ?
—From silly Bunthorne up to Dorian Gray,
The new Petronius of a "squalid village."* ⁷

* Grant Allen calls London a squalid village.

LE GALLIENNE.

And of the bevy of the "younger men,"
 Who there sat at the feet of Oscar Wilde,
 (Meet nurse indeed for this æsthetic child),
 Distinguished from his comrades even then,
 By all the tricks that mark the sycophant,
 Predestined yet to be the parvenu,
 One favourite minion of that Hierophant,
 Loved even to kiss the Master's very shoe;
 But thus we creep to ignominious fame,
 And popinjays usurp the place of men;
 As witness, you've already guessed the name,
 That sugar-coated prig, Le Gallienne.

Yet, all the "factors of success" were there,
 The skill to turn a nice, log-rolling screed,
 The poesies that languish in the air,
 From feeble pipe and "sweet," but forceless reed,
 The "precious" style that everything excludes,
 By which the reasoning instinct may be caught,
 While treacle out his sweet ineptitudes,
 To join the "tendencies of modern thought "

A certain taste, from Wilde, for things exotic,
 The symptom of this dear "decadent" age,
 That manner perverse, puerile, but neurotic,
 That now enjoys a sort of languid "rage."
 'Tis this, perhaps, that gives Le Gallienne
 The itch to dub himself—ye gods !—Narcisse, 9
 And make that lovely youth renasce again,
 Erotic as a green-sick nasty miss,

And yet, as doubtless Pasteur could expound,
 The virus, by being re-inoculated,
 At length is relatively harmless found,
 (The proper term, I think's "attenuated.")
 And so, where Oscar threatens to destroy
 "The very frame-work" of our *bourgeoisie*,
 Le Gallienne's sickly verses merely cloy,
 With only detriment to poesy.

"I am as beautiful," Narcissus cries,
 "I am," (*sic—fact !*) *as beautiful as that* *
 And so the poem languishes and dies,
 As silly as Narcissus, and as flat.
 Narcissus dies, but John the Baptist lives,
 At least a voice, though in a minim key,
 Pipes somewhere in the West and mildly gives
 The straight solution of earth's mystery,—
 By Faith, I think, if not Authority,
 For though he speaks like other minor scribes,
 He deals with common-sense most furtively,
 And smothers Reason in his diatribes.

* Actually a line in this young man's poems !—See Note 9.

St. John the Baptist ! No, it cannot be !
Ye sons of men ! what went ye for to see ?
A man ! and found a weak and shaken reed,
A gospel spun out in a windy screed
Of spangled thoughts and nebulous suggestions,—
A Bible peptonised for weak digestions,
Spinoza's subtlety or Sartor's style
Trimmed, tamed, dilute, with dilletante wile,
And finally to "perfect manners" brought,
Fit for the tenderest invalid of thought.

'Tis but our friend the Beauty once again,
And marks the progress of Le Gallienne,
This namby-pamby prophet who can dare
To flutter (in translations) on Voltaire ;
For Narcisse rescued from the shadows stygian
Has brought us back "A Love of a Religion ! " 10
And means to live a little longer yet,
The Angel Gabriel of a "precious" set.

SWINBURNE.

I turn my head, and suddenly a swirl
 Of words, words, words, astounds my struggling brain
 I vain I seek some meaning to uncurl,
 Some purport or ulterior aim—in vain.

I try to seize on every passing line,
 My mind keeps slipping from its wonted sense,
 Even though I now laboriously incline
 To puzzle out each separate mood and tense.

But still the words elude my comprehension,
 Though now I hear that rap-tap of the rhymes,
 Which had at first escaped my dull attention,
 Intent on finding sense within the chimes.

It seemed to me as if a silly girl,
 Pattering the music of a "gallop false" *
 Had caught me round the waist in giddy whirl,
 By way of invitation to a waltz.

A waltz is good, and rich round notes divine ;
 I love a waltz, with long sequacious swell
 Of billowy sounds, whose cadences incline
 The soul to swoon with music's passionate spell,

* "This is the very false gallop of verses."—*Shakspeare*.

But even waltzing may be out of place,
When metres, not adapted to the theme,
And rhymes exasperate, conceits lack grace,
And Swinburne verses utter nonsense seem.

This beating on the ear of rhyme is seen
To be a trick, and neither rich nor rare, ¹¹
An obligato on the tambourine
To force the music of a dulcimer.

You doubt it? then I'll prove it on the spot,
And beg you to observe each verbal feat,
The consonance, the rhythm, tricks, what not,
That make a Swinburne-spasm quite complete:

Though the sound of the syllables jingle
In the flight of a frivolous song,
Yet, Swinburne, not in a single
Sentence is common sense strong.

The why of the words, or the which
Of the meanings thy muse may intend,
Is ne'er to be notched in a niche,
Or bound in a brain with a bend.

Then, wherefore, O word-spinner spend
(Roses are red on a rainy day),
Time's treasures in trying to tend
The measures thy Muse may amend

By sweeping, or swooping away
 (Daisies deck the dells in May),
The word that restricts for the tricks that reward,
 The meaning that mars for the chimes that accord ?

Better roar and rant at your ease,
Or puff and preen as you please,
 With tum-ti-dee, dum-di-dee, dees,
Of fiddlestick-fired-Coryphees ;
Or daring the dazzling days
 Crash the upper-crust crass with a craze
For the faddle-dy, fuddle-dy, phase
 Of the haze !

LANG.

Next Andrew of the tactile fingers comes,
 And claims the throne where Jeffrey sat as king,
 Surveys his realm from Arcadé to Thrums,
 And knows the gloss at least of everything.

And, sooth to say, by perfect right he rules,
 For Andrew's most distinguishedly clever,
 And seldom has the training of the schools
 Produced a finer triumph—perhaps, never. 12

And yet, alas ! 'tis always thus, and ever
 Shall be in this faulty world of ours,
 A task too hard the union to dis sever
 Of cultured taste and dissipated powers.

His mind diffuses some illumination
 To every theme he merely glances on,
 And yet with all this fine appreciation, 13
 The primal impulse to create is gone.

That learning has been won at too great cost,
 And others' thoughts his lively powers o'erwhelm,
 The precious cargo, rich, and varied's lost,
 The while the ship drifts on without a helm.

That's Lang, *sans doute*—a dilettante first,
A student, then an amateur of sport,
Who flies from books with all their glare accurst,
And takes up, golf say—as a health resort.

And so to Haggard or Robustious Kipling
Pays warm and somewhat ostentatious court,
—He, the connoisseur of shades and stippling,—
Just as a dear old lady needs "support."

One can't but smile when languid Lang elects
To find a sort of Homer-like solidity
In horrid Haggard of the "big effects,"
Upholstered into broad, but flat, rigidity,

Or when he finds some recondite ability
In Rudyard's ballads of the barrack-room,
And much impressed by all their rude virility,
Repayes the entertainment by a "boom."

But after all, perhaps, he's more at ease,
When subtler thoughts and finer fancies please.
Or when he bends assiduous to explore
Some ancient myth, or curious folk-lore,
A graceful essay turns, or bubble blows
Of lustrous, shining, light and airy prose,
Or changes once again, perhaps for worse,
And fashions out a vase of fictile verse,
Or China ballade—well described as "nice,"
That goes off fairly, at a fancy price.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

“ Through thick Arcadian woods a hunter went,
 Following the beasts up ! ” That’s a brilliant touch !
 And just so Morris follows his scent
 Up, of tale or legend, fired (though not too much),
 By mediæval rage and some wild hope,
 That p'r'aps even he (good easy man) might catch
 The Muse's eye, and with the Olympians cope,
 —The “ white-haired boy ” of this half-century's batch.

O persevering, striving, luckless Will,
 Unknown in Paradise, though you have served it
 Well (v. Paradise, the Earthly) still
 Though you've not gained success, yet you've deserved it.
 A poet ? No. I think you half suspect
 That after all your forte is good intentions,
 And, mayhap wisely, do not yet reject
 The art of renovating old conventions.

“ I can't create—I can at least upholster, 14
 And build the lofty furniture, artistic !
 And pad, and puff, and ornament, and bolster,
 And teach my Pegasus a circus trick
 Or two, or three, to hide his broken wings,
 While Betty (that's my Muse) coquets, you know,
 Hops, flirts (she's really not a flirt, good soul) and sings,
 To bring the British public round the show.”

I don't quite understand that wilder move,
That makes you such a red-hot Socialist ;
Think you, dear William ? Can the muse approve
Such carryings on ? From you ? *Mon Dieu ! An Artist !*

Think you the British Workman cares a—well,
I will not use the British Workman's phrase,
For you or Lewis, Paradise, or Hades,
Art, poetry, " culture," or this later craze

For mediævalries " and all that rot," *
Of mummies from the middle ages dug ?
He's quite content with all the ills he's got,
And thinks these things—and now, don't you too?—
humbug.

* The British Workman *passion*.

LEWIS MORRIS.

O bring me beef and beer that I may write
 Even as Lewis Morris, think as he ;
 For Lewis doth a poesy indite,
 Not like brave Rab, inspired with barley bree.

Nor Byron fired by gin, nor Keats by Beauty,
 Nor Shelley, like chameleon, fed on air,
 But in the way of tough and downright duty,
 Sustained, so I should guess, by beef and beer. 15

There's body there, there's meat for tough digestion,
 Good wholesome fare for simple-minded men,
 Who take, and thank the Lord, without a question,
 Eat, drink, and stuff, and cut and come again.

"O dura Ilia messorum," Horace cried
 In admiration of the reaper's maw ;
 With *asinorum* be the phrase applied
 To all who sustenance from Lewis draw.

I've read his epic—rightly named of Hades,
 I've read,—no, no, be truthful—I have tried
 To trace the details of that crime he made his
 Name by, and his fame of—Epicide.

"O, why did Lewis do this thing!" I cried,
 "The crime so great, so light the provocation!"
"You don't know Lewis!" thus the Sage replied,
 "Nor that fierce motive—lack of inspiration."

School-girls read Lewis, with no small delight,
 He introduces them to the élite,
Of those high circles under earth ypight,
 Yet ne'er discourses but in terms discreet.

An easy, affable, familiar way
 Of talking with these people, Lewis takes;
And they, in turn, say all their little say
 Vernacularly—with poetic breaks.

Therein they show a sort of gracious flattery,
 As if to rise to Lewis' lofty heights
They must commit infraction, verbal battery,
 And gasp, and pant, in broken-winded flights.

But courage, Lewis, poets worse than you
 Have written, and not failed to please the ladies,
They are not known on earth, 'tis very true,
 But live, *parbleu*—like you—in epic Hades.

SIR EDWIN ARNOLD.

"The immemorial East" once more in view!
—What magic, when the very word avails
A thousand crowding fancies to renew,
Of leafy backgrounds of old tragic tales.

O balmy land of love and mellow rhyme,
Whose very thought bears odours on its wings,
'Twould seem that only in that Eastern clime
Our life its joys to fuller compass brings.

O for a poet! some sweet plastic wight,
A brilliant, gold-clad, purple charioteer,
To flash each perfect symbol on my sight
That reeks with that deep Eastern atmosphere.

To pant it out in all its glowing verve,
Its burning colours and its swelling tone,
And make it smart upon my tensioned nerve,
And flower with thousand wild hopes of my own.

And sing of life, and war, and love, and death,
As if each word in all its present sense
Were raised to finer puissance by the breath,
Of subtle pleasure, swelling, pressed, intense.

Or give to languour and dear idleness
Their own rich colouring and the popped strength
Of thoughts that rise in unforced perfectness,
And throb to slow and rounded joy at length,

But hark the cry is Arnold, and the great
Sir Edwin lumbers heavily in view ;
No chariot, but a sort of coach of state,
Lacqueyed and liveried in most gorgeous hue.

A literary juggernaut, whose wheels,
Crush out the spirit of each hapless wretch
Whose faith persists even after instinct feels
The linked dulness of that Epic's stretch.

Ponderous indeed ! as he who runs may read,
But he who reads must find it hard to run,
Burdened like Christian ere his soul was freed
Of grievous faults and misdeeds lightly done.

Lord Byron used to laugh at Southey's muse,
" Whose annual strains like armies take the field,"
But Arnold seems to stand in Southey's shoes,
And certainly in volume need not yield.

The Muse—can she be really on the side
Of big-battalioned Epics, serial ?
No, no, but Arnold hopes to over-ride
Her laws, by dint of sheer material.

Mere size, of course, may boundless fame bestow,
'Tis that that makes the Sun so talked about,
The Wall of China, Barnum's Greatest Show,
And Arnold's "Light of Asia" too, no doubt.

A massive, bulky, square solidity.
Is deemed the triumph of the National,
Or Saxon, type, and even stolidity
Is prized beyond its value rational.

And why? Because it's so respectable,
And after all, what's genius? What is wit?
Mere dubious quantities neglectable,
By honest bourgeois or aspiring cit.

The average man, perhaps rightly, has an instinct,
To look on poetry with deep aversion,
And even those cases where he's rather blinked
But serve to prove the truth of my assertion.

For, fearful of that vulgar eye askance
That aught original especially shocks,
Our present poets know their only chance
Consists in being ultra-orthodox.

One smells the fusty broadcloth in the rant
Of stertorous poets pumping up "a flatus,"
One smells the savour of the sickly cant
When inspired humbugs seek to "elevate" us.

Apollo decked in that distressing gear,
A " tall hat," turns our verses at command,
And irreproachably contrives, I fear,
To look, and think, and talk, like Mr. Chadband.

Nor from these sins is our Sir Edwin free—
At least, I do not wittingly asperse
His poems, when I say they seem to me
The " Daily Telegraph " turned into verse.

One gets the sense, in reading him, at length,
—To give the proper smack, I will not rob
The graphic, terse, vernacular of its strength—
Sir Edwin Arnold, Poet, " on the job."

The business aptitude for planning work,
The laboured theme, heaped up by word on word,
And eke the misplaced " pluck " that does not shirk
Poetic dangers, howsoe'er absurd.

The poetry of unpoetic souls
—I daresay Mr. Stead enjoys that stuff,
At least that's just the sort he most extols,—
I've given two extracts, perhaps, you'll think, enough.¹⁶

AUSTIN.

Bon jour ! dear, gentle Austin, not too soon
 After these strenuous toils dost thou appear,
 With that soft solace of thy "night in June,"
 Wrapped round in hazy, peaceful atmosphere.

O not one stirring of the air, or pulse,
 Intrudes upon that dusk, but discreet "song : "
 A sort of passive calm, and little else,
 To that good aunt, thy muse, doth well belong.

'Tis sweet to sit beneath the leafy shade,
 When still not dark—just after dinner hour,
 And feel, while yet the sky's with crimson ray'd,
 That soft-bloomed quietude's digestive power.

And then, ere yet a single throb of blood
 Should rebel prove to that fine influence,
 Rise, dust your knees, smile amiably, be good,
 In dear, wise, gentle, meek, mild innocence.

But then, love-making—fie ! you wicked thing ! 17
 Nay, nay, forgive me ; 'did not mean to hurt
 Your feelings, but you know, when poets "sing,"
 They often stutter, pant, or stretch, or blurt.

That love of yours is just about's lukewarm
 As any tender passion yet confessed
 In stealing, furtive, words, devoid of harm,
 By Psyche, pinafores and governesses.

A sort of winnowed, swept, and garnished love,
 Strained, clarified, dilute, and thrice refined,
 As sweet as barley-sugar, soft as dove,
 But somewhat unconvincing to one's mind.

At least to my mind, for I cannot think,
 Those Burne-Jones attitudes reality,
 Nor tapestry knights, that like dead fishes blink,
 The golden peak of ideality.

Your air to me's too thin, it's vacuo,
 I famish on your very tenuous screeds,
 Those blanc-mange sonnets, the unleavened dough
 Of epics, and the odes' thin stirring reeds.

No, no ! dear Austin, it is not convincing,
 These mere love measles with their weak sequelæ,
 These languours decked in phrases worse than mincing—
 Your women !—can they like it ? that is, *really* ? !

Perhaps ; our " serious Angles," Byron says,
 Are somewhat cold in love and stiff in dance,
 And, therefore, possibly enjoy these lays,
 That do at least respect *les convenances*.

Stiff dames and tepid verse—I'll leave it then,
And till my soul becomes a dusty cinder,
Must own my tastes rebelliously prefer
The girls of Spain, the soaring songs of Pindar.

Ah yes! the fire of Andalusian eyes,
The grace and verve that lives in the *bolero*,
"When castanets awake their bright surprise,"
The roll and rhythm of the soft *salero*,

That makes their Spanish walk a thing unique
'Mid all the charms that madden womankind
To that sweet dangerous creature born to wreak
Her beauty's havoc on the witchéd mind.

These things, I know, are foreign to thy theme,
May even grieve thy tame and guarded Muse,
That skim-milk She of yours, whose flights supreme
Mild flutters round the family-board infuse.

I must away—my nerves are fairly set
To find *revanche* in some wild dithyramb,
(If only, like Grant Allen, I were let)—
But "fault of that," I can but flatly damn,

Or faintly praise—'tis pretty much the same,
And find in you the "Tennysonian note,"
Diluted, small, occasionally lame,
But very good—for a suburban throat.

DOBSON.

Next dainty Dobson, delicately decked
 With various trifles from the Frenchy school,
 A school, moreover, half-forgotten—wrecked
 Amid the downfall of the ancient rule.

But some faint echo of that old *régime*
 Our Dobson's caught, for instance, the *tournure*
 Of Frenchy mode, the polish, and 'twould seem,
 A little spice of their *désinvolture*.

In rondeau, sonnet, trivial virelay
 He might be called—he seems to know so
 Many little tricks of fine display—
 A sort of dilletante virtuoso.

A connoisseur of Watteau painted fans,
 Bonbonnières, I think by Petitot,
 And all that trinket lore by which a man's
 Supposed his "culture" nowadays to show.

I called not long ago and lingered where
 He keeps his modern ancient curio-shop,
 And really that choice della-cruscan ware
 Amused me for the time I had to stop.

He's worked some ivory carvings, cameos,
And table ornaments, and statuettes,
Not badly, and unquestionably shows
Himself an artist in blue china sets.*

His *forte*, if such a word's not out of place,
Is saying nothings very daintily,
Lending inanities a sort of grace,
And tricking silly things out paintily,

You know that in the "best society"
—I do not know myself, I've only heard,
So'll tell the tale with that propriety
Due to "superior" things that seem absurd.

Well, then, you know the very highest "tone"
Disdains the heart, the brain, the pulse of life,
And seems ostensibly as cold as stone
To any stirrings of a deeper strife.

Then what remains?—a Brahmin-like refinement,
Metallic lustre, and the tenuous spell
Of winnowed Nature's high accomplishment,
Expressed in all that's *artificielle*.

Now of this caste is Dobson laureate,
And freely through the high demesne doth roam,
And with his versicles appropriate
Wins laurels at my Lady J's "At-Home."

* Mr. Dobson himself applies the term "porcelain" to some of his verses, and, certainly, in reading, one has the sense in quite a peculiar degree of that appropriateness.

And reigns the lion of the drawing-room,—

That is to say before the men come in
From dinner, and the literary boom

Is voted *vieux jeu*, unconvincing, thin.

But still the poet often gets a chance,

Not before men to strew his priceless pearls,
But to display them to the ennuied glance

Of "sweet," but thin, affected, gim-crack girls.

WILLIAM WATSON.

And next translucent Watson doth appear,
 And brings us lilies grown on Wordsworth's grave
 —A Mecca where he worshipped many a year,
 And learnt the trick of Wordsworth's minor stave.

Or rather, let's say something more in taste,
 Instead of "trick"—a sacred influence
 Hath moved his Muse to utterance most chaste,
 And given her fervours temperately intense.

And eke is "Mecca" totally out of place ;
 The name suggests fierce passions, war, and death,
 The pulse of blood, the flower of Moslem race,
 The deep-ensanguined banner of their Faith.

But we, the cultured ones of this fair isle,
 Appropriate Heaven in a cooler strain.
 Are others fervid ? Well, we can but smile
 In supercilious and fine disdain.

Our fire is quenched, our Faith has oozed away,
 And rapture marks a merely lower tone
 Than we permit ourselves in this choice day,
 That precious priggishness hath called its own.

Our poetry lacks force, and verve, and fire,
Most fittingly—that is to say, at length,
When we've been trained to dear delights t'aspire,
Of nerves depleted, fibre sapped of strength.

No more the Muse must wing her daring flight,
No more have colour, warmth, dynamic force,
Or fresh exuberance, or genial light,
Or wit to cheer a dull grey barren course.

But languid, pale, and bound to dull "correctness,"
Dream like a school Miss, like a Curate talk,
And reach at length th' anæmic perfectness
And spotless virtue of a celery stalk.

Yes, Wordsworth's good; I worshipped Wordsworth once,
"Thought not of any severance of our loves,"
Fed on his meagre "thought," like many a dunce,
And edified egregiously his "groves."

But Wordsworth's not summed up the whole of life,
Nor Cumberland the total Universe,—
His odes are excellent, the ideas rife,
The music good, the "thought" is bad; nay, worse.

But then those masses of most dismal prose,
The veriest (I must say it) flattest twaddle!—
As should the Muse, what time an East wind blows,
Drink tea, and gossip like a Molly Coddle.

You don't touch Wordsworth's depths, I must concede,
Dear William, but you do not touch his heights,
Your Muse is of a smaller, finer breed,
Content with mediocre, safe delights.

A bijou Wordsworth of the calmer mood
Of that great demi-god of Rydal Mount,
Your verse doth show—I think this notion's good—
A smaller, clearer, even chillier fount :

A deep, secluded, cold Wordsworthian tarn,
Where is that "tarn"—you know—in Scotland, is it?
Well, all the same, to quote the guide-book's yarn,
"A local treasure—well repays a visit,"

That's very like your Heliconian spring, 18
Calm, deep, and faintly tinged—diaphanous,
Free from all turbid, turgid thoughts that bring
The sense of life, and strife, cacophonous.

O life, O poetry, what notes of power
Sound while I utter them now carelessly,
And ring within me this awakened hour
Emotions surging up, tumultuously.

The myriad passions of the human heart,
The airy fancy, delicatest thought,
Fine emanations of that nobler part
Deep in the Man essentially enwrought.

I touch them all, these things of human life,
Each like a note of some loved instrument,
And seek the harmony within that strife,
That first o'erwhelmed me in bewilderment.

A harmony in life, and not apart
Secluded, hidden, cloistered from the view,
Refining some mere dainty thing of art—
Nay, let me find the deeper import true,

The feeling's clad in purple and in gold,
The joys that shake the heart and fire the soul,
The sheer delight of primal impulse bold,
Whose instinct breaks the bond of false control.

To taste of life, this thing that steals away,
To see its depth, its high magnificence,
To feel its broad sweep, and the magic play
Of all its diverse shapes of thought intense !

We live, then let us live, I cry again,
Though not in joys of sensual lethargy,
But wakened by the high, resounding strain
Of enterprise and sweeping energy.

And finer than content, the strange unrest
That buffets ever to a distant goal,
As were this life a march of endless conquest,
To new dominions of the passion'd soul.

BUCHANAN.

"Sing Heigho!"—cries Buchanan—"sing heigh—

But what, O tell me, Muse! what shall I sing?" . . .

Le lulli, tumti, tiddle tum, ti-die!

Sing that! sing anything! at least sing something!

Keep lilting at that tune, and do not talk,

But take my arm—keep humming on that air—

And let's down Edgware Road, say, take a walk,

It's like enough we'll drop on something there,

"You do not feel the inspiration yet!"—

No, but who does—Oh, do please keep the tune—

Of all our present literary set?—

I'm almost sure we'll get a subject soon,

You do not know, in fact you'd not believe,

How badly off I am, these latter days,

I who've known Burns and Byron—just conceive!

Reduced to deck L. Morris with my bays.

'Tis hard, it is, you're right, it's very hard—

The tune! keep up! a bard should always "sing,"

Sing bold!—especially a minor bard—

Sing bold!! we women like that sort of thing.

You do not lack at least audacity,
'Tis pity that you lack the finer gifts,
But still with Scottish pertinacity
You'll peg along where Genius often drifts.

And now I tell you this in confidence,
My gifts are seldom passports to success—
Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, furnish evidence *
And though the case of Byron, I confess,

Seems rather adverse to this argument,
His Lordship's other influence outweighed mine,
Else had my favours proved a detriment—
Especially in his tempestuous line.

Think for a moment of your *clientèle*,
Our friend the stolid, honest, average man ;
Say what for him did poetry avail,
Or wit, or genius, since his day began ?

He cannot feel a fine inspired touch,
He does not see a point too exquisite,
He's not endowed with Fancy over much,
And knows not " Art," or just enough to quiz it,

But thump away, and strike him at his level,
And he'll not grudge a certain meed of praise,
But like a tolerant, good-natured devil,
Respect even poetry, when once it pays.

* We are always apt to read history backward. Keats and Shelley met with but the scantiest recognition during their lifetimes; Coleridge had no wide popularity, and Wordsworth was fortunate enough to enjoy a certain fame only by virtue of length of days.

So hammer out, whene'er you get a chance,
A plain, but, if you can, a catchy, ditty,
And, Heaven knows, your name may yet enhance
The hundred grades of mediocrity,

And not the least ; why take Grant Allen's* rhymes,
Or Lecky's lucubrations, Gladstone's " Horace,"
Or even that inner temple where betimes
Austin to Austin speaks, Morris to Morris.†

Or, then again, where perverse Oscar poses,
Swinburne swirls, and Rudyard drums his heels,
Le Gallienne minces, Watson rather dozes,
And Arnold boredom's mighty power reveals.

Then give's a ballad, something stirring, swinging,
To show that Scotia never lacked for long
A bard, adept, say, more or less, at stringing
Good words to decent music for a song.

Then, heigh-ho ! once more, and crowd on sail,
And, light equipped, at peradventure steer,
And fling the breezy pennant to the gale
Of Buchanan, the bold, bad, Balladeer ! . . .

*" I am one of the few men " (as an American said to Longfellow, *apropos* of his " Evangeline ") who have ever read Grant Allen's *Physiological Æsthetics*—an excellent book. But really Mr. Grant Allen should be more loyal to his former ideals. A few more verses like the last, and he will be included among the minor poets ; while by virtue of his post-prandial philosophisings, I fear he may yet be dubbed " a thinker."

† Trumpet to trumpet spake, thunder to thunder.—*Drayton*.

But now methinks the name's not Buchanán,
But Scotch Buchanan ; yet that touch will serve
To point out what he lacks,—the dash, *élan*,
The brilliancy, the flash, the burning verve,

The swing, *Je ne sais quoi* ! perhaps the wing,
The spell at least, the something not of earth,
That stirs, when minor bards forget to "sing"
And some true feeling finds poetic birth.*

* " The leaven,
That spreading in this dull and clodded earth,
Gives it a touch ethereal—a new birth."

Keats.

KIPLING.

Next Rudyard Kipling bounds into the ring
 With "Hello! here we are at last!"
 And kicks the sawdust in the spangliest fling,
 Of ground and lofty tumbling unsurpassed.

"The Star of India in his daring feat,"
 —Yells the ring-master with a sounding crack—
 "Of driving elephants down Regent Street,
 Or doing Hyde Park on a tiger's back."

Or if not that, he does the next best thing,
 And serves us up "the immemorial East,"
 In extracts, essences, with taste and sting,
 And savour of reality at least.

The born yarn-spinner of the lazy nights, 19
 Of idle days in India's fervent clime,
 The gossip's* gusto's felt, even as he writes,
 Or flings in "colour," thick, from time to time.

His "local colour" glitters from afar,
 With *bunnia*, *khitmatgar*, or *ryot* blent
 With current English, each word like a star,
 Set brilliantly in India's firmament.

* My old friend and gossip (Scotch).

The East, the West, the Old World and the New
Have yielded laurels to his conquering spear,
Prose, poetry, and much between the two,
Have brought fresh wreaths with every mellowing year.

Yet, in the end, methinks, his forte is prose,
And that mysterious East his habitat,
He has his fling there—right or wrong, who knows ?
Whereas in Whitechapel, Sims* finds him flat.

As Poet, nae, nae,—not of the elect,
No depth, no atmosphere—good verse, however,
As if he rhymed because " it is expect-
Ed, don't you know ; " that is, in one so clever.

And yet some verse of his the other day
Reminded me, a certain spice, of Byron,
What time his Lordship undertook to flay
And roast Bob Southey on a moral gridiron. 20

I mean the " Vision of Judgment " ; Kipling's theme
Seemed pretty much the same, and though his rhyme
Lacked Byron's wit, and point, or salt, or cream, †
His humour sometimes touched on the sublime,

At least, I thought, but now comes Sir Criticulus,
Who gives the meaning quite a serious phase,
Which rather makes sublimity ridiculous—
Curious. . . . But I know not. Here's the phrase :

* George R. Sims gave an amusing parody of his " Bedalia Herods-foot."

† Attic salt seems to be much the same as French cream.

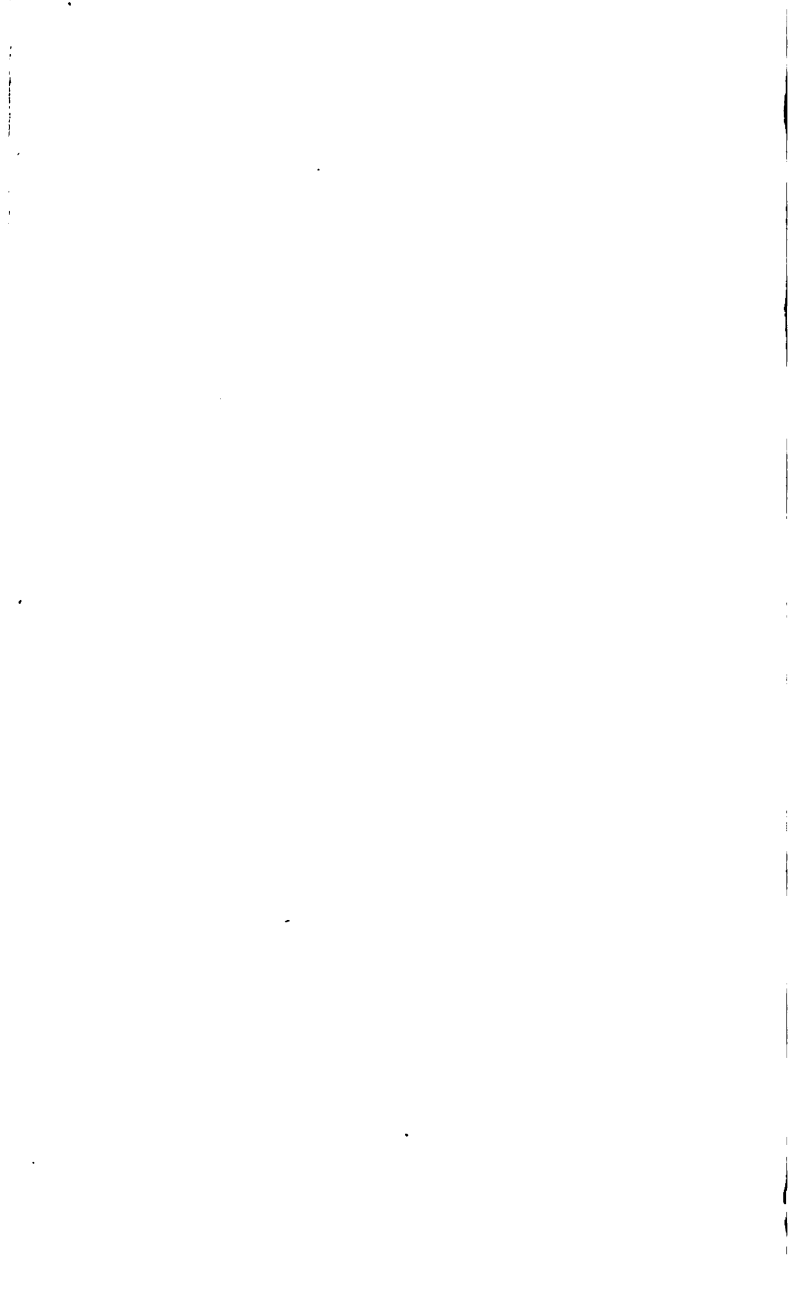
"Hanging with the reckless seraphim
On the reins of red-maned stars"—Ah, that's a speech
For mere articulate words to sound! Though too supreme
For mere articulate men, perhaps, to reach! 21

And so "upon Soracte's ridge we part,"
On one side, bathos; t'other, highest Art;
And midway—such is man! weak, vain, pretentious—
A spice of humbug, shallow, but sententious.

And yet I'll say that in my irksome duties
Of reading up my men in search of "beauties,"
And wading through the mass of English prose,
That flat, and narrow, dull, and pasty flows, 22
And travelling over wastes of barren verse,
(A lesser penance might my sins amerce,)
I found in Kipling that uncommon treasure,
A modern author one can read with pleasure
Without being wheedled, whipped, or forced to read
By "culture's" calls, logs rolled, or critic's screed,
Good, vigorous work of humorous utterance,
A billowy style, a fund of fresh exuberance,
That wondrous knowledge of all mortal things,
That some few weeks of press-work always brings.
That knack of writing in all climes with ease,*
If not with insight, yet with journalese,
A real "live man," of whom it will be said,
He lived the while he lived, and died when dead.

* "He had like Alcibiades
The art of living in all climes with ease."

Byron.



I *FAME.*

What is fame? To penetrate the provinces; to be read in foreign tongues, to be mentioned casually. And the siftings herein implied make the ultimate product remarkable. For example, it has been said that this century may hereafter yet be called the era of Darwin; but what was Darwin in his day? To all, except a narrow coterie, a rustic recluse innocently amusing himself with doves and butter-cups; afterwards a blasphemous and dangerous old cynic, who scoffed at Genesis and derived men from monkeys. Again, in far-off Australia, the living men whose intellectual proportions loomed vastest to my mind were Herbert Spencer and Bain of Aberdeen. With what profound devotion, earnestness, conviction, I read, analysed, and re-studied their works, I am now hardly able to realise! In Berlin, I found Spencer well-known but not often very pointedly referred to, whereas Bain was generally, for good or bad, regarded as the most prominent figure in the psychological world. The reason was simply that with the high specialism of Germany, and their methodical systems of work, that man alone was likely to be esteemed very noteworthy who had added some definite links to the chain. Spencer's time has

hardly yet come, for his work, vast as it is, lies outside the realm of what may be called technical psychology. Again in physics, the names of Thomson, Tait, Clerk Maxwell, and Joule were as familiar, perhaps more so in Berlin than in London; and while a hundred professors here well-known were there absolutely ignored, the name of an optician like Dollond would crop up as one who had done good and decisive work.

En revanche, the men of "culture," of "light and leading," "the leaders of thought," the popular historians—the Greens, Matthew Arnolds, Mark Pattisons, the Newmans, the Gladstones, have made no impression. Both in France and Germany the work of Darwin is appreciated in a higher spirit than in England; the researches which have supplemented it are conducted with enormously greater activity.

When I came to London, what was my veritable amazement to find for how little the great thinkers counted, that it was considered a wonderful honour for one of them to be allied to an aristocratic family, and that the greatest of them were weighed in a sort of shopkeeper's balance, and dismissed as eccentric and scarcely reputable personages. Nor was my astonishment less on finding my ears besieged by the names and the fames of a host of lesser individuals, shrieking fanatics, shallow praters, third-rate novelists, fourth-rate historians, tenth-rate thinkers, and a perfect sea of popular propagandists, 'midst whose blatant utterances any clear note of reason seemed absolutely drowned.

Yet, is this not in the nature of the case? From Galileo to Descartes, to Darwin, the story is the same.

Galileo's book was burnt; in our day it would simply be banned from the bookstalls; Galileo was imprisoned; but in

our day, what prison is worse than that poverty to which the unorthodox student is necessarily condemned? And in England, in matters of thought, I think one can say, without being querulous, the condition of affairs is especially grievous. In the free and genial air of France all intellectual progress is in the van, a quarter of a century ahead of the rest of Europe; in Germany, as a sort of escape-valve to their fearful political system, an admirable freedom of scientific work and all speculation is permitted, and, as a consequence, the great thinkers, Kant, Fichte, Herbart, Lotze, Büchner, Ebbinghaus and the rest, are all University products; in England, the thinkers have all been rebels, Locke, Hume, Mill, Spencer, Darwin, Bain, and have found in the miserably provincial spirit of our great Universities their most formidable difficulty.

2 CLIQUES, COTERIES, AND CRITICS.

When I first came to London, I was introduced to W. B. Yeats, who showed me some kindnesses, for which I feel, to this day, indebted—matters of no moment, but which showed at least a genial disposition in himself. One of these little courtesies, however, ruined me. He introduced me to the Rhymers' Club, a small assemblage of poetically pious young men, who met in a little room upstairs in a tavern in Fleet Street, I believe it was, to imbibe strong liquors and to read each to the others, their latest effusions.

Now, most of this poetry was of that kind which, while not approaching mediocrity in any real force of movement or feeling, yet, again, in its elusive way, attained some upper Emphyrean—mainly of nonsense—in which it vibrated its tenuous wings. Or, when not in this mood, the poetry was Wordsworthian in its calmness and coldness, as was the case with one sonnet on an Irish lake—the best thing of the evening. Valiantly, indeed, did I try to keep up my spirits and look appreciative, but to me it was breathing in *vacuo*; nor had I the chance of escape in sliding out of sight under the mere mask of stupidity, for one of the party was a witty man, and with jokes, frequently blasphemous, and mainly indecent, sought to exhilarate the evening and win appropriate *kudos*. It seemed

to me a curious commentary on the exquisite refinement of culture obviously solicited, for these medical student-like pleasantries were the only valid, durable things of the entertainment. However, the most ridiculous part of all was that when Le Gallienne was in the very act of reading and swooning away on his own flowers of poesy, the waiter came in with the strong liquors previously mentioned, and kept advancing and retreating in trepidation, scarcely knowing whether to be cheerful or overawed—finally much puzzled as Le Gallienne concluded his incredible verses with the touch of sublimity in which he declared

“ I am as beautiful

As that ! ”

I could conceal it no longer ! The waiter and myself were the only outcasts of this Elysium.

Now it so happened that nearly every man in the room was not only a poet, but a critic, nay they were a ring of critics, bent on “booming” and “log-rolling” each other’s productions, and of course correspondingly truculent in stamping out others ; and when I published my own little “Modern Authors” I was not long in discovering that they “had their knife” in me.

3 CRITICISM.

I do not say, in so many terms, that criticism is absolutely venal, but it is corrupt in insidious manners, that finally and virtually reach to that condition. I have referred to one little system of log-rolling; but there is another form of a wider scope wherein critics attack all books of a certain class; just as Keats' poems were attacked, less on their own merits, or demerits, than because Leigh Hunt was detested in authoritative quarters. One of the criticisms that amused me most and, possibly, injured me most, appeared in the *Saturday Review*. It was, as Byron said of Brougham's ridicule of his own poems, "a master-piece of low wit"—that sort of wit of which a cynical club man gets a kind of "knack," and which can be retailed at measure after reading the title page, the preface, and the index of a book, with a couple of pages of random. From a perusal of this anonymous bludgeonry—a sort of dentated guffaw—I concluded that its author was a Tory, a lawyer, a belle-lettrist of limited intelligence and feeble grasp of mind—the type of the literary, narrow, cultured little cynic, who had once been drilled in Horace. He made great play of my habit of introducing foreign words, especially *bunt* and *derb*,—not bad words at all, supplying, as they do, terms not easily re-

presented in English. Be that as it may, these two apparently insignificant words slew my "Modern Authors." Another point that incensed my critic—for he turned his attention only to what he considered demerits—was that I had after an appreciative discourse, averred that Sir Walter Scott seemed to me like a "Great Boy." I beg to return to that epithet—for consider his delight in field sports, in single combats, in the pom-pom and fanfarronade of war and greatness, in mere muscular strength, and his absolutely puerile glorification of the Feudal system, and the heats, passions, sorrows—as vital and personal as if referring to something that happened yesterday—over this lumber of an outworn age; and withal the disproportion of his emotional qualities to his powers of thought.

My book, "Approaches: the Poor Scholar's Quest of a Mecca," fared even worse than "Modern Authors." The causes were not very hard to find. It was brought out as a novel, whereas it was not a novel at all. Further, it was full of faults, for though the most ambitious, it was the first of my writings. Finally, the passages of real power were excised, altered emasculated, at the urgent request of my publishers, and in deference to the dictates of that thoroughly immoral standard—the Cant of the day. My object was to describe the development of a mind, or, to adopt the sort of catch-words that seem to be popular—the Pilgrimage of a Soul; in other words, observing how harsh and sterile were the usual presentments of ethical questions, I undertook to display a theme in which the problems of thought and conduct should be worked out in the stuff of life itself. I wanted to make the motives, temptations, vicissitudes of a man something felt, rather than pointed out. Hence the damage done to the

book by diluting its power. I selected as a hero, one of a certain complexity of character, prone to all manner of error, of a deep and passionate nature, but having, as a sort of saving principle, the qualities of energy and inward truthfulness. I still believe, although it has been a failure, that there was merit in the book, and the central idea continually appeals to me as the right line of guidance, so that even now I have some inclination to return to the same project. As to criticism, the final word is not always said by an unhappy scribbler who reviews perhaps 13 books for a guinea ! (Fact, have known that as rate of pay !)

4 SIN.

In the exquisite little study, entitled "Pen, Pencil, an Poison," the word Sin occurs incessantly. It is the key-note, always struck in with such fine intensity, that its delicate tinnabulation is heard at last ringing throughout the entire theme. This is "artistic," and therefore admirable. It is always artistic, but I must say at times absolutely amusing—the etiquette, the sense of circumstantiality, of consideration, with which he ushers in this potent syllable. Here are some of his gems of thought:

"One can fancy an intense personality being created out of sin."

"It may have been for a caprice, or to quicken some hideous sense of power that was in him, or because she suspected something, or for no reason."

"Sin should be solitary, and have no accomplices."

Mr. Wilde speaks like an *arbiter elegantiarum* on the subject. Let us hear him on another point, interesting to those who make study of subtle problems of Psychology, it will be unnecessary to say Pathology of mind.

"Like Baudelaire he was extremely fond of cats, and with Gautier, he was fascinated by that 'sweet marble monster' of both sexes that we can still see at Florence, and in the Louvre"
 The Sphinx?—*quoi!*

5 BRIC-A-BRAC.

Culture is no sinecure. Here are a few things, to take them at random, in which those who would enter the temple must be versed: Fictile vases, (preferably Greek), Florentine majolica, Trays of Tassie's gems, Rude Lamps from Roman Tombs, Persian carpets, the Italian and eke the English Renaissance, Blue china, Japanese paintings by Hokusai and Hokkei, Early editions, Wide-margined proofs, Blank pages, Venetian bindings, Hypnerotomachia, Bonbonnières with miniatures by Petitot, the Private Lives of Tiberius and Heliogabalus, of the Court of Madrid, with its love of the grotesque, Baudelaire, Gautier, and, especially, Paul Verlaine, all the modern French Symbolists and Decadents; and *in excelsis*, (or is it, *in profundis*?) that basic rock, whose green-edged vein is for ever cropping out—SIN!

6 RESEARCH.

In one of his books, he is at no small pains to give an idea of the sinister occupations of that Emperor, "half blood, half mud,"—with predilections for the latter part of his character. The stories related of Tiberius are too monstrous to be credible, nor are they, as a matter of fact (a fact, however, of which this diletante of research does not seem to be aware), true.

In the fifteenth century—a great century for forgery—a continuation of the Annals of Tacitus was forged by Poggio Bracciolini, in whose delectable imaginations the more cultured of our youth have ever since been piously instructed. The forgeries are so gross, that Voltaire, not suspecting the real explanation, but by simple force of insight into character,

declared that Tiberius could never have been such a personage as represented in history.

7 Few things in literature are so saddening as the spectacle of Oscar Wilde's career, and nowhere is this regret more profoundly expressed than in one of his own sonnets :

" To drift with every passion, till my soul
Is a stringed lute on which all winds can play,
Is it for this that I have given away
Mine ancient wisdom, and austere control ?—
Methinks my life is a twice written scroll
Scrawled over on some boyish holiday
With idle songs for pipe and virelay
Which do but mar the secret of the whole.
Surely there was a time I might have trod
The sunlit heights, and from life's dissonance
Struck one clear chord to reach the ears of God :
Is that time dead ? lo ! with a little rod
I did but touch the honey of romance—
And must I lose a soul's inheritance ? "

A remarkably well-expressed sonnet, I beg to think. In fact, as a sonnet writer, he has few superiors in the language, and it is the impression of his fine gifts and his weak fibre that has made me temper the terms of my characterisation.

8 CONTEMPORARY IRISH LITERATURE.

The *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum* is not doing itself justice in these latter days. . . . The Irish mind is distinctly literary. Glance at an Irish newspaper or listen to a thorough-going Irish orator, you will observe the love of words not merely as expressive of meanings, but for their own peculiar values. In fact, sometimes, or rather but too often, the flow and the dash of a rhetorical period is obtained at the utter expense of common-sense, or even of meaning. Again, that the Irish are an extraordinarily witty and humorous people is generally conceded, but cannot be realised except in their own country and in the freedom of intercourse. Again, the Irish are a vigorous, passionate, impetuous people, with a perfect *diablerie* of movement, whether in a charge at the bristling files of an enemy's ranks, or in the mental rush at brilliant, impulsive ideas.

Now, it is precisely these qualities that are absent in our latest developments of representative Irish Literature. Douglas Hyde has mainly contented himself with his researches into the bardic period of Irish Literature, but the product he has brought to light is not altogether convincing. It is melodious, beautiful, intricate, curious—parallel, in fact, in literary workmanship, to the elaborate carvings, tracery,

and all manner of ornamentation to be seen, for instance, on an ancient Irish cross. . . . There is always something insincere and factitious in the admiration of the past, even the past of magnificent civilizations like those of Italy, Greece, the Moslem Empire, Spain; but the true records of Irish history make painful reading even, or rather especially, to an Irishman.

However, to continue the theme, Oscar Wilde, at his best, is a somewhat tinselly Sheridan (himself inclined to too much surface glitter), but originally interpenetrated with inspirations from a far deeper and more vital source than Sheridan ever knew—John Keats. Some of Oscar Wilde's sonnets are hardly surpassed in the language, except by Keats himself.

In his "A House of Pomegranates" he outvies Keats in the luxuriance of the beautiful images he heaps up, and, therein doubtless, he runs to fault; his ideas do not flow spontaneously, there is too much artificial building up and overlaying, too much suggestion of the close luxury of an over-stuffed chamber, redolent of musk and sandal wood. At his worst, Oscar Wilde sinks into the abysses of degeneracy.

George Moore is an Irishman, "but a bad one." I know but little of his writings.

Downey is an Irishman, and a good one; but I do not know that he (as others I could mention) considers himself in the "movement." His humour is as original, delightful, and "kindly," as the peat-browned potheen of the valleys that never saw an excise man.

Katharine Tynan (to give her the name with which she won her reputation), when I first had the honour of knowing her, was "under the influence of Rosetti," and it seemed to me

curious that this daughter of Erin, a lady so essentially Irish in characteristics, should strain after an ineffective imitation (for all imitations are ineffective) of a product of "special culture," not to say sophistication, in a world so remote from her own. Latterly, she has centred more on herself and her own native inspirations, and with happier results.

Hannah Lynch has won for herself a distinct position, but I cannot speak definitely of her qualities.

W. B. Yeats has, in one sense, "more in him" than any of the other Irish writers, even in the volatility, or elasticity, with which he presses on through the quagmires of his affectations, perversities, and shallow theories. He is said to have a fine lyric strain, but I have been unable to detect it satisfactorily ; on the contrary, he often seems to me to break down in the baldest fashion on the mere rudimentary ground of metre. I find the pious task of reading Yeats very irritating, for the reason that his own native quality never seems to appear at all, except in occasional passages in his prose. Again, is it not curious that this young man of eminently Irish quality, born in beautiful and breezy Sligo, must needs slay all that has come best to him as his very birthright, and turn the indomitable Irishman into some far off Hindoo, effete through a hundred generations of atony.

Yeats will do good work, brilliant work, yet, but he must *jeter sa gourme*. And probably he will do his best work in prose, well spiced with humour.

Finally, in all contemporary Irish literature, there is a lamentable lack of calibre, of masculine energy, of intellectuality not identified with dilletante appreciations. The outlook of Ireland's present writers is a very narrow one ; their training or any enduring work of literature too meagre ; their thoughts,

both restricted and shallow, and utterly ignoring the vast intellectual movements, which, in future times, will be seen to be the main features of the present day.

9 NARCISSUS.

Byron speaks of "a handsome man, that human miracle," and even Byron's countenance, though to me it is a very agreeable one, has not escaped the cavils of the critics. Leigh Hunt said that his nose looked as if it were stuck on. Others averred that his eyes had a suspicious and sinister expression, something like the sidelong, *louché*, regard (according to Taine) of the young Bonaparte. Finally, his countenance was not particularly masculine, and he seems to have been guilty (*vide* Gronow) of the peculiarly misde-meanant action of curling his hair—putting it in curlpaper!

Still, Byron was a very handsome fellow. I like Keats' face even better; and in another fashion, Bonaparte's. They show genius in their very look. By-the-way, there is a beautiful little picture of Bonaparte as First Consul (by Gérard) in the Museum at Antwerp, which is Keatsian in outline and fineness.

In the flesh, I have only seen two or three countenances which combined a fine masculine quality of energy and intelligence with well-formed features. One of them was a young German professor, whose pale face was a little worn by his constant vigils, and whose rough, uncombed, tawny hair, was generally singed a little by the flame of a gas jet. His eyes were

yellowish. Yet when animated (as, for instance, in describing the progress of Thermo-dynamics), his whole manner became so energetic and brilliant—"electrified," in short, to use the hackneyed phrase—that even his tawny hair took character, his pale and slightly freckled face glowed like St. Michael's, his eyes became as lustrous as an angry tiger's. Another handsome countenance I remember was that of a French cavalry officer, who rode a white Arab steed, and looked like the Cid Campeador.

I mention these things, because beautiful images have a fascination for me ! Le Gallienne's conceit in comparing himself to Narcissus is very laughable. He has, (since he really invites the comment) good eyes, a fine forehead, and dark, hyacinthine locks; his mouth is that of a prim and mean parlour-maid ; and the expression of his countenance has much in it of the same quality. The countenance is, indeed, of one who has never engaged in manly occupations, not even in manly sports ; it lacks all that fine, bold and masculine, resistant quality, which is mainly what one looks for even in an Adonis.

10 *THE "NEW" RELIGION.*

Le Gallienne's "Religion of a Literary Man," is in the true spirit of the delicate man of "culture." Naïvely ignorant not merely of any research into the historical aspect of Christianity, but ignoring even the most prominent and popular of the works of Biblical students, he launches his

little bark upon the safe waters of platitude ; shallow, inconsistent, but not ill-expressed, as far as verbiage is concerned, in his style of sugared limpidity. Not one original thought, not one note of power, not one deep, grave utterance, or stirring of nervous force ; neither grasp, calibre, nor purpose ; nothing but his treacled stream of acceptable phrases, livened here and there by touches of feminine malice.

Let us consider for a moment the style of the thinker, and the man of " culture,"—and when I point the word culture in this fashion, it is because the name is generally arrogated to mere dilletantism, at best a virtuosity in trifles.

That being so, let us, like the two poets at the Court of Haroun Al Raschid, select a horse as the subject of discussion. The thinker knows his horse, through and through, but his knowledge rests within that limit. The man of culture has read a hundred books on the horse, and emphasises, or rather adorns, every mark by an apt quotation, astounding the ears of the bystanders by his learning. But at the same time he cannot tell the pastern from the hock.

I have known one of this " precious " set, at a small suburban assembly, dispose of Darwin with a mere wave of the hand, pointed by a contemptuous expression about " materialism " ; and thereupon this young man, exceptionally shallow even for a popular lecturer, launched out upon the high seas of Theosophy ! He had never read two consecutive pages of Darwin. " The Trinity, the Atonement, Infant Baptism, Baptismal Regeneration, the Immortality of the Soul, the Life Hereafter—these and many other dogmas are now seen to be matters of symbolism or personal intuition "—*Voilà, Le Gallienne*. He quotes Spinoza. Do you think he has read Spinoza?—He gets even his

quotation second hand, hangs on to it a piece of spangly rhetoric—in which he misses the point of Spinoza's reasoning—and passes to some new gilded feat.

11 *METRE.*

The mention of Swinburne naturally leads one to consider the questions of rhythm, metre, and the thousand and one points that arise in the technique of poetry. I say thousand and one, because the subject has hitherto been but barely trenched upon, and that in spite of the voluminous and pedantic treatises which discourse upon "English Versification." It would be impossible in a slap-dash note or two to bring much conviction to the mind as to what may be conceived to be the development of this matter, but I shall at least, if only in a few hints that may be suggestive of thought, ask the reader to consider the question from a new point of view.

In the first place, then, our familiar rules for estimating metre are so meagre and so wide of the mark as to be almost ridiculous. The basis of our system is the separation into accented and unaccented syllables, these taking the place of the long and short of the classic models. But this method ignores what after all cannot be eliminated by any mere conventions from the appreciation of effects—the vital

qualities of long and short sounds, in their finely distinguished grades. It ignores also the exquisite but very appreciable differences of weights of accent—even to the twelfth degree, and it ignores, or rather very inefficiently recognises, the pauses, the sequences, the speeds, and forms of movement of the measures.

The reader will find appended to this note a couple of themes, framed ostensibly upon the same metre, in which, though the sounds themselves have no particular meaning, the effect is very widely different. One may suitably be called, "An early Spring Morning;" the other, "A Dirge for a Young Wife."

As another example, Pope has spoken of the "needless Alexandrine" that "ends the song,"

"And, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along."

Yet a very great variety of effects can be produced by the Alexandrine. Compare:

"Skim in the living wave, and 'neath the sunlight dance."

"And El Mamun?" " ' Good grass! but not the Sáadan.' "

"Or saddle horse ev'n now, and speed the flying race."

In fact, the Alexandrine can be made a spirited, and even dashing, metre.

Again—to show the inadequacy of our system of metres—a line or a stanza is never read (if, indeed, it be not read in the painful collegiate fashion) in the formal metrical measure; or

usually, if one wish to look to the metre, the passage must be read again.

Further, no poem, (except, again, a very dull one), has ever been composed according to the requirements of our metrical notations ; and Byron, though many of his lines descend to dog-grel, has yet produced some fine effects (as, for instance, those in the opening of the " Bride of Abydos ") by his disregard of metre, and his half-conscious searching for the forms that interpret his verve and changing mood.

If the whole question of metre and rhythm were analysed, it would be seen to be extremely complex ; and though, I think a command of metrical form exceeding anything yet within the compass of our poets could be taught to everyone of ordinary intelligence ; yet the quality of poetic taste, and the force of poetic inspiration, would still be essential in the choice of words, in the subtle estimation of their weights, of their movement, in the appreciation of the vowel and consonantal effect, and the adaptation of all these qualities to the sense, not only of the line, but of the stanza, and of the whole poem.

Yet no poet could build up a poem, a stanza, or even a line in this elaborate fashion. By continual observance and by natural taste, his appreciation should become so saturated with all these matters of poetic technique, that the right words come by instinct, (for instance, Keats, whose poetry is distinguished by every word having its exquisite value, was rapid in composition). The whole line should come at once, not the separate words ; and so, even in the sonnet, the form, the weight, the distribution of impulses, and the proportions should be, if not clearly impressed, yet, at least, adumbrated at the first blush, the inspirational seizing of the poem.

Hence it happens that it is the uninspired poets, the poets of careful technique, of culture, of "correctness," who are so wretchedly faulty even in verbal points. I could prove this up to the hilt by a thousand examples. (*Vide* note.)

The early spring morning.

Li lille tan le tanty pool eteese,
Enum etenny tinne dar,
Elan eleese,
Araté ekedax icar
Asoté ikedum elixedeese!

Dirge for a young wife.

Ve thavé dâght, edôthy doom athyse,
Adrum, aphrôni, dumme dôth
Aphreen athryse,
Arámé ethedax acroath,
Pharsôvé hathidoom athyrse t'mgryse.

It may be interesting to search for the original of the metres employed.

12 THE PRIDE OF THE SCHOOL."

Diligently have I read a number of Mr. Andrew Lang's books, not altogether liking him, expecting, even maliciously wishing, to find something on which to base my instinctive aversion, but being continually disappointed, even by the flow of his geniality—exasperated thereby—more than once compelled to admiration by some felicitous manner of expression or fine, even *recherché*, feat of criticism. I could cite, for instance, his wonderfully well-balanced estimation of Dickens.

13 Wide indeed are the ranges of Mr. Andrew Lang's appreciation ; from Rider Haggard's barbarosity to the finest feathery stir of a Theocritus phrase ; from learned tomes on Ritual and Myth to a game of cricket ; from rollicking Lever to Tacitus. He can enjoy in imagination the quoit throwing of the Homeric Games as much as, in reality, the golf play of Kirkaldy. He has beheld with equal pleasure the whirling wheels of Sophocles' chariot, the leaping of a trout to his own fly in a Highland burn, or the marvellous catch at Lords by which George Ulyett disposed of Bonner. Yet, since I must

have my cavil, the appreciation is always Lang-like. He is not

" The man who with a man
Is an equal, be he King
Or poorest of the beggar-clan."

He writes of cricket like a bad player and dilettante spectator who finds his delight not in the game but in his literary allusions. He glorifies Tennyson and disparages Byron. He is a genial, exquisite, literary man, sensitive to the delicate finger-tips of his feminine nature, learned and thoughtful beyond most of his brethren; but he gives me the idea that he would not read my own books, and that he would assassinate me with a knitting-needle.

14 *CABINET POETRY.*

Select William Morris, at haphazard, in his most famous poem

" A king there was in days of old,
Who ruled wide lands, nor lacked of gold,
Nor honour, nor much longed-for praise,
And his days were called happy days."

This is as slow and respectable as the family brougham. Note too the wretched metre of the last line, its absolute ineffectiveness. It is the more necessary to call attention to these frequent breakdowns in our most "correct" poets, because it is the redoubt behind which they continually shelter themselves, after making a sally, say upon Byron or Keats! Let us take, for the sake of comparison, the following line :--

" A thing of beauty is a constant joy : "

That is a "correct" line, and so it was originally written by Keats. So it would have contented for ever any of these perfect poets of "taste." Keats himself, however, from the

start knew that it was deficient, that there was something rigid and lifeless in it, and so, taking a second cast, wrote:

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.

At once the line awakens, blooms, and throws off its subtle atmosphere.

Yet what the advantage of these fine flights, these efforts of genius, if we are continually to have forced upon us for admiration the passages and lines where they are conspicuously absent? That is the impression I get from reading the Morriszes, the Austins, the Arnolds. They irritate me like a note of music that just fails of striking true. Poetry has no mean. It is either Heaven or Hell, and these gentlemen give not often a glimpse of Paradise. Nor—for I will speak my mind, even if it cost me my literary life—nor does their great Tennyson. It is on his *art*, his *technique*, his "faultlessness" that I should be well content to wage the battle. He has some villainous lines. So has Keats, you may retort. True, for every virtue has its fault, but of its own peculiar quality. Keats would have torn up the proof sheets of most of Tennyson.

Nothing is to me more certain than the inspirational motive of all true poetry. Every great thought rises with its own afflatus, and announces itself in its very coming as something genial and divine. There are times when in a few moments the mind can behold the very work of months, and when it would seem that if one had a thousand tongues the whole poem might thereupon be uttered forth. Then, too, everything is seen in true proportions, in its true atmosphere, and endued with its odours and its tints. The word comes with certitude. It is this inspiration that

is wanting to the heavy stylists. They do not see the vision before their eyes, and with their eyes fixed altogether upon that, translate it. They sit them at their desks conscientiously, and cudgel their brains for ideas, allusions, descriptions, metaphors. Their lines come barrenly, with none of that impalpable air of delicate associations. Yet line by line they build up their poem like a wooden cabinet.

15 TYPE OF POETS.

The type of poets, the children of Apollo,—to cite the hackneyed phrase—is that of Byron, Shelley, Keats and Burns. There is a distinct “family likeness” between them all. They are geniuses, one could say at a glance; their very countenances have the glow of inspiration—swift spirits, “beautiful as pards,” with fire, imagination. Turn from these to Lewis Morris, William Morris, Arnold, or any of the highly respectable gentlemen who give us ponderous tomes of unalleviated rhyme. Is Lewis Morris a child of Apollo? Does Lewis Morris even look like a child of Apollo? Is such a putative paternity probable? even plausible? The methods of these masters are plain, direct, conscientious, and if the truth must be said, generally as flat as ditch-water. And this is nowhere more poignantly felt, than in those examples where they attempt to rise to poetic flights, because there is forced upon one the sense that “of such is the kingdom of Heaven,” to the class of aspiring young men who band themselves together for Mutual Perfection.

Take this from Lewis Morris:—

“ And when the laughing girls

To some fair stripling's oaten melody.

Make ready for the dance.”

Or this :

“ They cut with knives
The taper girlish throat.”

Or this (I could cite a thousand instances) :

“ When the swift fire takes
A woman's heart, and burns it out, and leaps
With fierce forked tongue around it.

I could easily imagine Mr. Stead, to cite a type at hazard, dancing fandangos of ecstasy over these performances. They are the spasmodic leaps of a poor, fagged, essentially “ornery” Pegasus.

No one, unless he has to write his little piece, thinks of the passion of love as leaping with *forked tongues* around the heart. Nor do the ideas of any man flow naturally in the series of the following passage, which is poetry (after the fashion of M. Jourdain) simply because it is not prose—the composition, the sequence, the selection of ideas, are not good enough for prose :

“ Then it was again .

A woman whom I saw, *pitiless, stern,*
Bearing the brand of blood—a lithe dark form,
And cruel eyes which glared beneath the gems
That *argued* her a Queen, and on her side
An ancient stain of *gore*, which did befoul
Her *royal robe*.”

This is poetry of the kind that makes one feel the hopelessness of *arguing* it ridiculous.

“*Gegen Dummheit kämpfen vergebens die Götter.*”

16 HONoured POETRY.

All of the passages I have quoted for reference in the present book are from the best parts of the best poems of the authors (see "Poets and Poetry of the Century"); therefore, Sir Edwin Arnold cannot feel aggrieved—perhaps, indeed, in the security of his complacency, he would be astonished to learn that there were any occasion for grief, if I give the following as a specimen of his "work."

"Come,

Sweet son ! and see the pleasaunce of the Spring,
And how the fruitful earth is wooed to yield
Its riches to the reaper ; how my realms—
Which shall be thine when the pile flames for me—
Feeds all its mouths and keeps the King's chest filled."

A true poetic movement is surely never expressed in this stilted style. "The fruitful earth wooed to yield its riches," is unworthy of a second-rate provincial sermon : no, on reflection, it is worthy of that altitude. "*When the pile flames for me,*" I presume means, "when I am dead." There is a complete directness and truer poetry in, "Poor old Jeff has gone to rest."

The feeding all the mouths and keeping the King's chest filled, is too ridiculous.

As another example :

“ And night and day served there a chosen band
Of nautch girls, cup-bearers, and cymballers,
Delicate, dark-browed ministers of love,
Who fanned the sleeping eyes of the happy Prince.”

The last three lines contain metrical faults, the second and the fourth being especially bad.

It would appear that some of the dark damsels (why dark-browed merely ?) fanned the sleeping Prince. Observe the characteristic mark of the would-be poet, “they fan the sleeping *eyes* of the *happy* Prince.” It may be blank prose, but it amounts to the same thing, and is a shade less absurd, to say, the happy eyes of the sleeping Prince.

17 *THE RAZZIAS OF A "CHASTE" POET.*

Mr. Austin has the reputation of being among the most chaste and fastidious of writers. Yet in one of his best sonnets we find such lines as these :

"Thy absence exiles sunshine from the sky :"

A most forced manner of expression, which leaves one cold by reason of its very artificiality.

Or again :

"And thou

With orient eyes dawnest on my distress."

What meaning to attach to the phrase, "orient eyes," I hardly know, but by no manner of interpretation am I able to make it anything but a far-fetched conceit.

Besides, the line is indefensible according to the metrical rules dear to this school of poets.

These examples have not been selected by virtue of their badness. On the contrary, they have been taken from one of Mr. Austin's best poems.

18 POLISHED VERSE.

I have devoted to Mr. Watson perhaps more space than his acknowledged position among contemporary poets would seem to warrant ; but, in spite of the strictures of my verses, it may be permitted to me to say that this consideration seems to be due to the virtuosity of his literary style. I believe that there is no writer, with the possible exception of Oscar Wilde, so delicate in the choice of language, and none so desirous of preserving a certain fine spirit of classicism, in the clearness of conception of a poem, and in the conduct of the thoughts. In short, Mr. Watson might be a poet if he would get rid of, once for all, that thin savouring, brass-tasting, thrice accursed *Cant anglais*.

But now to enter more particularly into the question of technique. I mean to show, in all fairness, that even this most correct of poets, this shining light (I say it here with no touch of malice) of chaste and distinguished diction, is capable of falling into sheer faults, that I do not think even the "slap-dash," "haphazard" Byron would have tolerated for a moment. Of course the reader will not expect to be confronted with "shocking examples" of verbal solecism, but rather will be required to sharpen up his critical appreciation, and to give his judgment with fine discrimination ; for the

instances will be selected from the choicest parts of Mr. Watson's masterpieces : *

" 'Tis human nature's happiest height to be
A spirit melodious, lucid, poised, and whole."

—A good thought, a good verse, in fact one of his best. But first note that the second line has a distinct metrical fault, which will be apparent in observing that the line would run better by saying sprit for spirit.

Then the first line is awkward in syntax, and has an ending altogether too feeble. It is awkward in syntax, because of the repetition of the forms of the verb, "to be," The sense is, that, a spirit melodious is the height of human nature, (how a spirit can be a height, we may pass over as a point of hyper-criticism) but Mr. Watson makes it, that *to be* the spirit is the height.

The verse is continued :

" Second in order of felicity
I hold it to have walked with such a soul."

The metre is lame in the first line; there is quite a halt after "second," and that halt is detrimental to the effect, as it makes the words "*in order of felicity*," sound flat.

In another poem, a very short one, and selected for its perfect workmanship) he uses the expressions :

" Towers to a lily, reddens to a rose."

This is a piece of *préciosité*.

* Those selected in illustration of his quality in "Poets and Poetry of the Century."

Again, let us consider one of his most admired sonnets.

" Our greatness is become a tale
To tell our children's babes when we are old.
They shall put by their playthings to be told
How England once, before the days of bale,
Throned above trembling, puissant, grandiose, calm,
Held Asia's richest jewel in her palm ; "

The third line is really too weak to be pardonable. The idea is already contained in the first two ; we have in the first line a tale, in the second that it is to be told to our *children's babes* (note the affectation) ; and then in the third line, the only thing added to take away the flatness of mere repetition is that they shall "*put by their playthings* to be told."—This is simply laughable. Why not tell them at porridge in the morning, or after saying their prayers at night ? Then again they are to be told of these things in very stilted language—that "*days of bale*" would puzzle a wise child. I can only guess what it means myself. The "*throned above trembling*" is an absurd way of speaking of a nation. The mind involuntarily flies to the idea of an earthquake to find a vindication of such a manner of expression. The "*grandiose*" is a little daring, but (*me judice*) happily so. I cite it to show that I do not desire a mere grammatical or conventional criticism. And, to give point to what I have already asserted respecting Keats and Byron, if the word *grandiose* should be esteemed a fault, then I say it is at least a fault of a Keatsian quality, and the difference of its effect may be well compared with that of the others. By the *richest jewel*, I presume, is meant India, but when a poet really thinks of England holding India, does he form the

image of her holding "*Asia's richest jewel in her palm.*" I say a poet, with good intentions, for I can easily imagine the glorious moods of an ambitious journalist (I am afraid I am thinking of the deplorable Mr. Stead again) arriving with rare self-complacency at "imagery" of this kind. The sonnet continues:

" And with unnumbered isles barbaric she
The broad hem of her glistening robe impearled,
Then when she wound her arms about the world,
And had for vassal the obsequious sea."

The first is a bad line; mainly by its weak ending in *she*, and secondly that the words *barbaric* and *unnumbered* should change places; *barbaric isles unnumbered* makes a good sequence, for the thought must be first in reference to the isles, and then the idea of their multiplicity arises, and they are disposed of in the contemplation as, unnumbered. But to call them unnumbered, and then to call them barbaric, is to make a mental false step. Then again, the *she* is so weak, and the previous arrangement so awkward, that at first reading one is apt to conjoin the *barbaric* with *she*—"barbaric she." The "imagery" of the succeeding phrase is altogether too strained and artificial. It is poeticising of the type that made Byron exclaim in impatience to Tommy Moore, expatiating, according to poetical etiquette on the moon: Oh damn the moon, it gives me the ague.

Lines like this go far to explain the aversion of the "average man" for poetry, and also the humour of the comic journals in dealing with the irritable race. Does any reasonable being find his mind braced, or is a grander idea given to him, by speaking of England embracing the world

and wearing isles (even barbaric isles) *impearled* upon her *glistering robe*. The average man's plain, common-sense idea of the situation, capable of being expressed in terse prose, is infinitely more vigorous, convincing, truer than this manner of phrasing. The average man says "fudge," "slumgullion," "rot," or whatever contemptuous expletive may be familiar to him ; and forthwith the genial poet raves at him for his "Philistinism," his lack of soul.

The average man is really nearer that "white of truth," which should characterise all poetry, as well as prose. Poetry that cannot be analysed, that will not bear to be shaken to pieces, and to be tried by the same test of common sense as prose, has something in it of radical falsity. Poetry should differ from prose in its greater power of expression, in its condensed and irrefragable force. To talk about having "*for vassal the obsequious sea*," is sheer rubbish. It does not impress. One can understand the obsequious Matabele, the obsequious Sublime Porte, or the obsequious half-brother to the Sun and Moon ; but the obsequious sea—stuff !

There is, in this sonnet, the weak ecstasy of an aspiring school-girl, a clarified enthusiasm that jets out as coldly as soda-water. Compare it for an instant with the gravity, the *mdle tristesse* of Bonaparte, speaking of big interests.

19 *THE FORCE OF KIPLING.*

To omit Kipling would be like reserving the bust of Brutus from the funeral procession. Therefore he is included by way of good fellowship; though, if I were to profess to be unappreciative of the power of his writings, as indeed of one or two of the others herein mentioned, I should but succeed in defining pretty closely my own limitations. It would not be easy to parallel Kipling's good qualities—his abundant exuberance, extent of superficial observation, and firm, strong control of his subjects. Byron has the range of a world above anything yet shown by Rudyard, and a fine spirit of wit unmatched in English literature; but our own man is more solid, more strongly set, and could have taught the tempestuous bard many a thing, good to know. In fact, he has an utterance of wisdom beyond his years—perhaps beyond his capacity.

²⁰ Southey's "Vision of Judgment," it may be presumed, is never looked at except to give point to the reading of Byron's.

²¹ The passage quoted, however, and even the "red

maned stars " themselves pale their ineffectual fires before this burst of glory :

" And oftentimes cometh our wise Lord God, master of every trade,
And tells them tales of His daily toil, of Edens newly made ;
And they rise to their feet as He passes by, gentlemen un-
afraid."

There is in that an "infantine familiar clasp of things Divine," which is highly gratifying. The original of the "wise Lord God " is not very far to seek—a hard working, omniscient craftsman, genial withal, a great story-teller, the delight and the pride of the Junior Constitutional Club in "Elysium."

22 *THE VICE IN GRAIN.*

"Fade, pâteux, et delayé dans le vide,"—such is a Frenchman's description of the leading articles of our leading journal.

I beg the reader's indulgence to consider the matter a moment, if not with the desire to conciliate, at least with the endeavour to state unbiassed impressions.

One of the finest proofs of an author's power is when he exercises a "spell" over his readers, and draws them on to read even against their original intentions, and by virtue of no persuasion or duty, nor by any discoverable "artistic" trickery, but by sheer force of interest. Byron has such ; charm for me ; Keats, also, is a finer realm ; Shelley had and has now at his best, Of English prose writers, Carlyle seems to me to be one of the few. . . . The Germans, to turn to them for a moment before speaking of the French, possess but a disappointing literature. Even Goethe has written masses of stuff, flat, tedious, and thoroughly, Teutonically dull, such as would be tolerated in no other language. I should greatly desire the opportunity of entering more fully into this matter, but meanwhile I expect to be called an ignoramus, a fool, a prig, an impertinent, etc., etc. by every clever little critic who has never read a line of "Faust."

Into French literature, I entered with a certain kind of prejudice,—the absurd idea, that there is a certain finical manner in all they produce. Nothing could be more false and even ridiculous. The French are the most virile people in Western Europe, and their literature gives abundant evidence of the fact, apart from the artistic force and expansion that carry them beyond the range of all other moderns. It has been my own experience to find in the ordinary French daily newspapers, (and in most of them,) writing that for brilliancy, point, and at times, vigour and energy, is not surpassed by our present literature at its own highest water mark. . . . I read Walter Besant. I have heard him read out to me by an enthusiast, and a very intelligent man, who seemed to think that he was "sufficient for the day," nay, for all time ! The sentences brought home their meanings, but they sounded flat, wooden,—destitute of atmosphere, of the thousand subtle, indefinable things that make good literature. And similarly, I confess, there are few English writers who give me delight in reading, proportionate to the time I spend upon them. I read tenaciously, from a sense of resolution, of duty. I turn to a French writer, from Zola to Hervieu, from Adam to d'Esparbès, and am immediately animated, delighted, refreshed ; I insist, reinvigorated. The principle is not isolated. It crops up in a thousand different forms. Read the leading articles of any of our "organs of public opinion." The Frenchman's characterisation of the *Times* shows the effect, the cause is hidden in that veil of hypocrisy and pretence which interpenetrates every phase of national life. Our articles, even articles in the Magazines, are written as if the writers had a hundred little conventions to respect, a hundred different interests to conciliate.

The great art of journalism, it has been asserted, is to write all round a theme without striking it ; and in the best journals, this requirement seems often to be secured by "turning on" to a subject some graceful, dilettante writer who knows virtually nothing of the matter in hand. I once had occasion to propose to an accomplished journalist, one of the best in every way in London, a project for a paper which should speak, if not the truth, yet as much of it as men utter familiarly in their Clubs, or in the street in ordinary conversation. "My dear sir," said he, in complete seriousness, "you know nothing of the situation. Hypocrisy is the saving grace of our intercourse in Society."

Yet in France they manage things better. The leading article in a French sheet seems always to be written by a man who knows and feels his subject, and who has no other desire than to "write himself out," to drive home his points. Even for this pleasure one could read a French newspaper in mid-Sahara, whereas we take all other journals, like the wine of the country, only in their own province. Again, newspaper literature is by popular repute the most fugitive and trivial of all ; and after a year's reading how many leading articles are remembered, even if it be simply on account of a fine phrase ? Yet, without effort, I can recall the delight it has given me to read mere ephemeral articles in Parisian halfpenny sheets, and could repeat their exquisite turns of expression.

These matters hang together, I aver, with the standards of our morality. We have made the girl of sixteen the arbiter of the moral "strength" of our literature ; consequently the intellectual power, the scope, the depth of our work is reduced to the same injurious criterion. It is easy enough to fire off

some cheap witticisms upon myself, for instance, for asserting this position, but my object in thus writing is not to depreciate our literary power, but to break a lance for its complete emancipation. Our writers, moved, half unconsciously perhaps, by the influence of the environment, seek shelter in some little *coins de la vie*, where they produce excellent but limited work ; but the final result is, that our literature is becoming provincialized, and, if it must be driven home, ridiculous. Mr. Hardy explores his Wessex, Mr. Hall Caine his Isle of Man, Rudyard Kipling his tract in India. The refuge is in mere story-telling ; there is no literature that surveys even our own local world with regard to the characteristics that mark our own day as distinct. Where there is an escape at all from the provincializing tendency it is in some merely bizarre and outrageous feats of originality, principally by women writers ; and the upshot of the tyranny of the girl of sixteen is, that there find their way into the novels of the circulating library amazing and ill-digested ideas that are far better discussed—with saner handling and immensely greater knowledge and calibre—in the medical journals.

In protesting, then, against the emasculating tests of our literature, I protest also against being understood to be an advocate of licence, "realism," hysterics, or any particular form that the literary tarantula may develop. I say only, let us have fresh air and a clear draft through the stuffy cloisters of convention. Let us see everything in daylight. Virtue is superior to Vice, let us say. Then what is virtue that it must be wrapped in hypocrisies and cant, that it trembles at the onslaughts of its rival, that it must resort to every subterfuge of lying, of cowardice, of petty oppression, of all manner of sham and fraud ; that it is continually shriek-

ing out in horror against the idea of an impartial tribunal and a fair trial. Is not this the "excremental virtue" spoken of in scorn by Milton?

Again, go to the Academy, and admire every separate painting and the careful technique of our excellent artists; then sum up the total impression. Is it not one of insufficiency, of restriction, of provincialism, of originality exhibited only in caprice? Go to the Salon, and bear away in your mind the magnificent impression of the world of art therein revealed. What force, what quality, what refinement, what mastery of the painter's art! Originality is found often enough there, no doubt, in something bizarre, but also in those astonishing works of power that rest upon a foundation of truth. The modern French painters surpass any thing the world has ever known.

It may be said that English artists exhibit successfully in the Salon. Precisely; they are the rebels to our schools, just as the Herbert Spencers and the Bains are rebels in matters of thought.

Again, consider the drama. I have seen, in one of the best theatres in London, one of the greatest, and perhaps the most poetical of all the plays of our representative dramatist,—played, too, by the most famous, possibly, of our actresses.

The audience exhibited warmth only upon two occasions: once when an interpolated ballet was introduced and danced with that mechanical and meaningless strutting out of legs, which we have been content to admire as the summit of the "Terpsichorean Art;" and again, when a chariot was driven on to the stage with two real white horses, which seemed to have been pollarded over with flour to bring them that effective colour.

Of course it may be rejoined that it is scarcely fair to take Shakspeare as a popular English playwright, and the critic may bid us look to H. A. Jones and George R. Sims. Still, I maintain that, upon his own merits, however out of touch with a modern audience, Shakspeare has qualities that do not yield even to the most successful of our modern dramatists.

Further ; in order to make his play—it was Antony and Cleopatra—passable, it had been cut to pieces (all the poetry evaporated) and exhibited as a succession of spectacular effects. Can any one imagine a great play of Molière acted in Paris, by the Comédie Française, falling as flatly ; yet I insist the comparison is perfectly fair.

Now, to impute all these deficiencies to the girl of sixteen is, perhaps, to overrate even her malign imputed influence, but it certainly is bound up with "the whole system of things." In short, I mean to say that the drawing closely the limits of provincialism, the shutting out ideas of expansion, and the apotheosis of the idea of smug domesticity, is working like a ferment of corruption in the national life, and not only in art, literature, and science, and all manner of "thought," but (as could be shown in the most practical affairs, and in the most curious ways) of prestige, material power, and enterprise. In other words, I mean to fight neither for "Vice," nor for "Sin," (these interests are ably enough championed) but merely for Freedom, and, as I understand it, Virtue.

23 BYRON AND KEATS.

Byron dismisses Keats' case somewhat loftily, as though he were the superior being, without question. His cynicisms at Keats' expense, however, proceeded, I feel convinced, not so much from a mean disposition, but from ignorance of the real circumstances, for Byron at the core in spite of all his extravagances, vanities, and susceptibilities, was a "sweet fellow." He boasts that when he was attacked, he did not perish, but drank a couple of bottles of claret, and dashed soon afterwards into his brilliant lampoon. Valiant, indeed, to a man of title, wealth, and *entrée* into any path he should care to choose! He had but to overcome a cutting personal pique, and his revenge was at hand. But with Keats! With all the spirit and gallantry of Keats' character, and the intellectual power that enabled him rightly to gauge the qualities of his own work, and the value of the reviews, with all that fine truthfulness in him that was the very essence of his nature—yes, knowing all this, I still believe that the Reviews killed John Keats. They did not kill him by direct consequence of their attack, especially in its immediate effect; but as time passed on, Keats needs must have found, as he himself relates, that between him and fame, between him and even the ear of the public, there was a barrier of prejudice, ill-will, and immense authority; that even such a

revenge as Byron availed himself of—if Keats' fine soul could have stooped to it—was denied vogue and acceptance ; that the Reviews meant a definite bound to his career, and that the final issue must be either the abandonment of his poetic dreams, or heart-breaking delay to their realization ; that even the meanest questions of subsistence and work were affected by these hostile Reviews. That was all involved in his thoughts and survey and speculations, when he declared, “ I have no depth to strike in ”—the feeling that his poetic gift was, after all, except to himself, something unreal.

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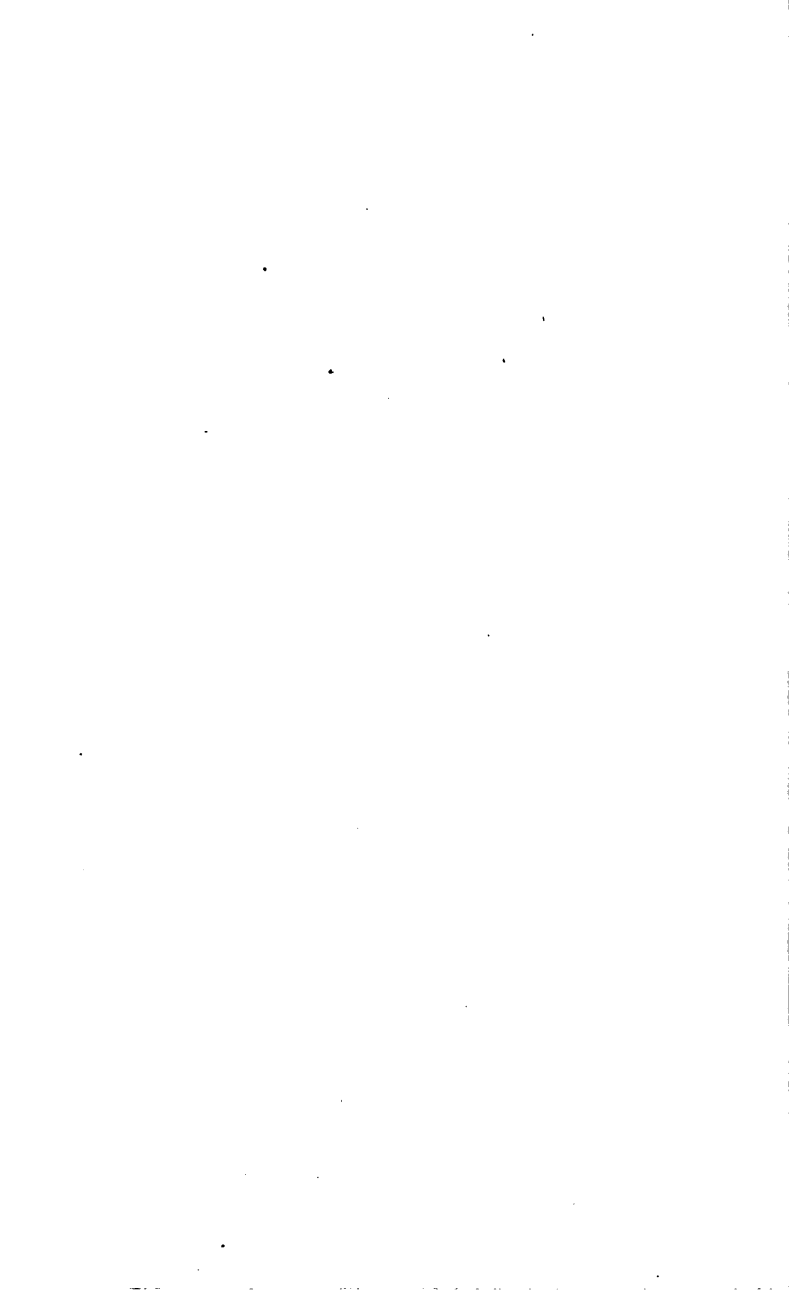
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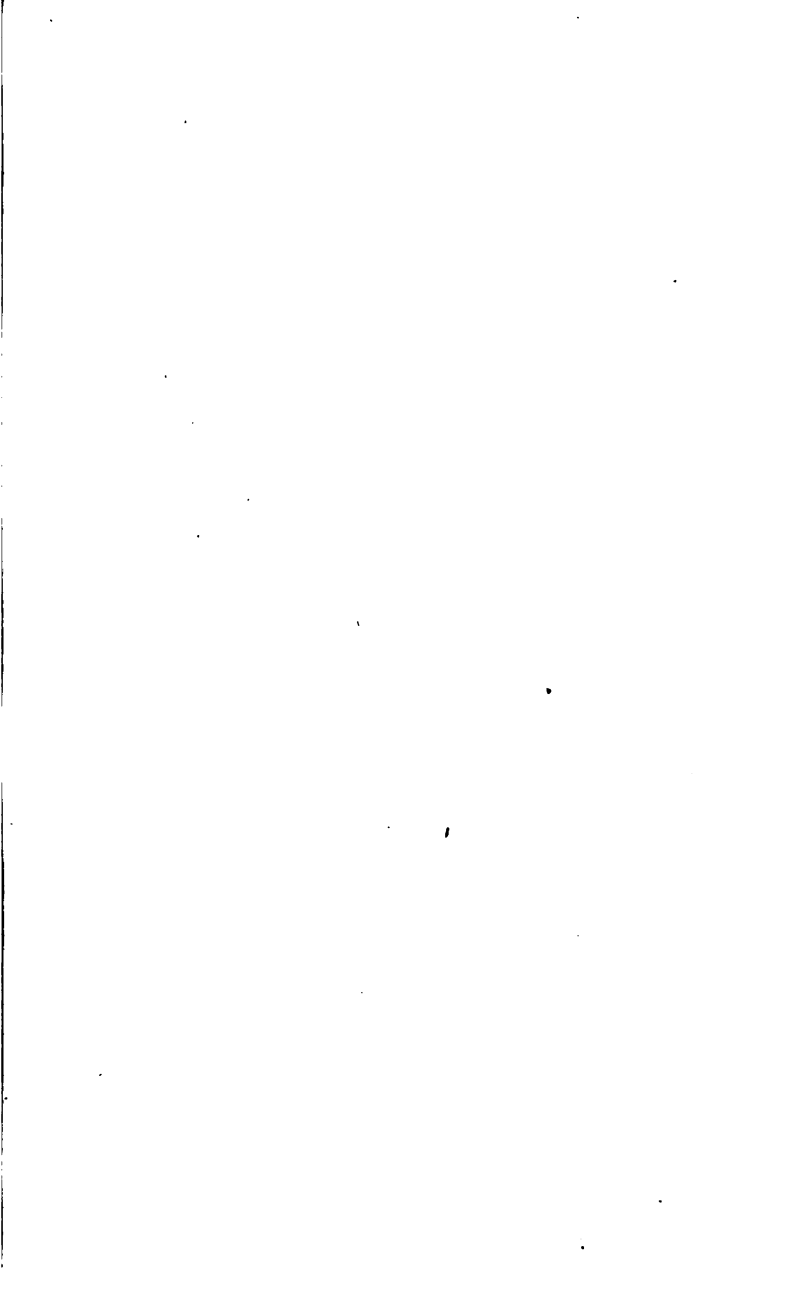
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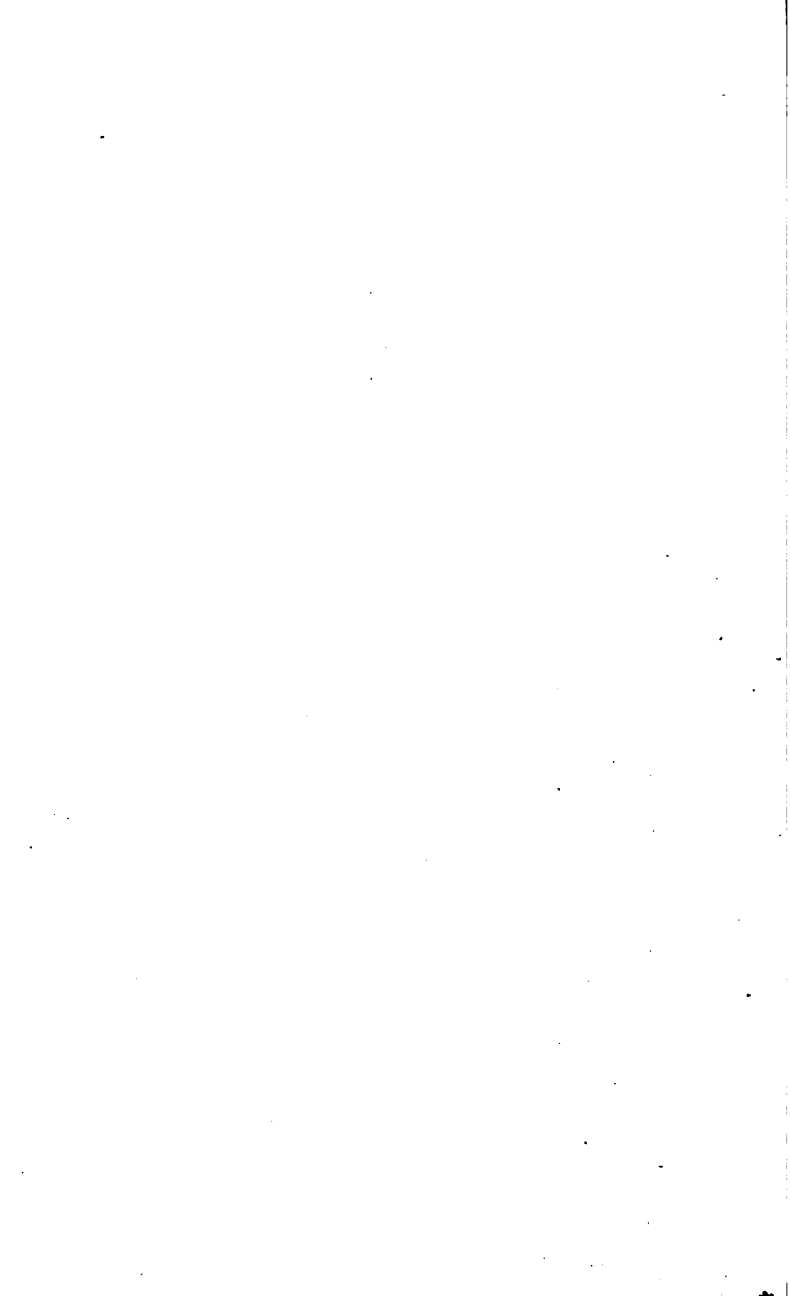
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